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LEON BLUM:

SOCIALIST AND FRENCH PREMIER

DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

History Honors Thesis

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May 1, 1984

TO MY PARENTS

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The historical success or failure of any policy is measured by the actual outcome of events, but that success or failure is not determined by prescience or wisdom, by right or wrong. The course of history, of victory and defeat, is circumscribed by the fortuitous confluence of resources and opportunity.

--L. Dawidowicz

PREFACE

On July 14, 1936, the French people celebrated the anniversary of the French Revolution with exceptional optimism. The Popular Front of France, headed by the socialist Léon Blum, had been elected two months before. Its primary support, the workers, were confident in the new government's willingness to alleviate their mounting poverty. Within six weeks of coming to power, the Popular Front proved itself able to negotiate with employers and union leaders with the significant Matignon labor reform agreements. More than one million Parisians including Blum and his cabinet marched past the monument of the Commune, up the Rue de Rivoli, towards the Place de la Nation, alternately singing the "Marseillaise" and the "Internationale," waving banners of "Vive Blum", "Vive le Front Populaire."¹

"Never," wrote the editors of the Vendredi, a left-wing political and literary weekly, "was the Place so beautiful."² Blum, fist raised, preceded his ministers on the podium, over a huge poster of Jean Jaurès subtitled "Down with War! Long Live Peace!" He addressed "workers, people of the countryside, small proprietors, small investors, shopkeepers, that the Popular Front has gathered together": "On this day July 14, let us swear to uphold the revolutionary chant: 'Friends, let us always remain united' (Applause and bravos)...The will to unity must rest among us as the rule and the pact."³ The Vendredi captured the enthusiasm of the audience:

Saint-Just said happiness was a new idea. Today in the Paris air, we breathed the novelty and birth of that idea.⁴

Four days later, in the Hotel Matignon, meeting with a delegation of teachers and union leaders, Blum received a dispatch from the French Ambassador in Spain reporting that a military revolt had erupted in Spanish Morocco.⁵ "There are new complications ahead," Blum told the delegation. "If we succeed in what we are undertaking, no one will be able to say that events made our task any easier."⁶

On July 20, the Premier of the Spanish Republic, José Giral, sent Blum a telegram for arms and planes. Spain's Frente Popular, older than France's by only a few weeks, seemed to be a natural ally. Was Blum to aid the Spanish Republic? Assisting a legitimate government was in keeping with international law. Strategically, after Germany and Italy, a third potentially hostile front was a menace to France's security. Yet at the same time, the Popular Front had itself sworn to "defend democratic liberties...and to give peace

to the world's humanity."⁷ Blum immediately met with his cabinet on the 20th and in fact did approve a shipment of planes. However within two weeks, he was to put forth a policy of "nonintervention" in Spain, and to call for the other European powers, primarily England, the USSR, Italy, and Germany to abide by it.

Why did Blum respond the way he did?

"All his life," wrote Joel Colton, a distinguished biographer of Blum, "his socialism and his republican patriotism were fused into a single mold." In Blum's speeches, actions and later testimonies "he attempted to demonstrate the harmony and consistency of the two ideals."⁸

How did Blum, then, adapt his republican patriotism, and responsibility to France's national defense, to his long-held socialist principles of internationalism, and pacifism in the crisis of the Spanish Civil War?

Was the government personally responsible for the choice?

Blum's humanist, democratic socialism was directly inspired by Jaures's harmony of socialism and patriotism. But had the world climate of 1936 rendered this harmony obsolete? As Blum's most recent biographer, Jean Lacouture, put it, how could Blum "identify the conflict between imperialisms of 1914 with the unilateral threat which Nazism represented?"⁹

Finally, did Blum have any viable alternatives in dealing with Spain? Was nonintervention avoidable?

Keeping these questions in mind, this study will investigate Blum's response to the Spanish Civil War. Contemporaries and later scholars have differed in their assessments of this response.

First, Blum's most recent biographers, Colton and Lacouture, maintain that his fear of taking risks prevented him from taking a strong stance in support of the Spanish Republic. Blum's perception of his duties as a democratic leader within a coalition government were reinforced by his personal qualities. Writes Colton, "his desire not to offend political allies or even strong opponents, his role as conciliator and advocate of compromise, his strong sense of moral integrity, his faith in the integrity of others" limited Blum's vision of alternatives to nonintervention.¹⁰ Colton and Lacouture accuse Blum of a naive and misguided faith in the cooperation of national leaders, borne of his socialist ideals. The nonintervention policy embodies the tragedy of this faith.

To other contemporaries and Blum, the nonintervention policy was the only alternative to civil war in France. Anthony Eden related in his memoirs an interview with the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Senhor Monteiro, who had come away from France "apprehensive." "He would be much relieved if France got through the next few months without some serious internal conflict." "Monteiro," Eden went on, "was one of the first to think that France might be shattered, because the hatreds within the country were greater than the hatred of some Frenchmen for the foreign enemy."¹¹

Would a majority of the French have followed Blum into Spain? Blum said it was impossible for him to risk war without the consent of

public opinion.¹² But according to Blum's former Minister of Aviation, the working class "would have willingly given up the advent of an unquestionably just social legislation to help the Spanish Republic."¹³

Thirdly, still other historians view Blum's policy from the perspective of dissension within the Popular Front itself. Lacouture argues, for example, that since the Communist Party refused to participate in the cabinet, Blum's political stand depended on alliance with the more moderate Radical Party.

When one considers that the two most influential Radical ministers in the circumstances, the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Delbos) and the Minister of National Defense (Daladier), became, respectively the symbol and the defender of nonintervention, it is justifiable to say that in the Spanish affair, the Radical party, half the Popular Front on the governmental level, exercised an invincible force of obstruction. Any policy claiming to provide long-term aid for the Spanish Republic would obviously have led to a cabinet crisis and a breaking of the Popular Front "contract."¹⁴

How "obvious" was the threat of the Radical Party?

Fourthly, some explain that Blum advocated nonintervention aware that a rebel victory was likely, that Italy and Germany would have sent more arms to Spain anyway, and that the French military establishment supported the Franquists. Did Blum accurately gauge the strategic threat? How much authority did Blum exert over the military, and did this affect his decision? "While prepared to justify his policy in terms of military exigencies, it seems unlikely he was so susceptible to their dictates," observes historian Robert Young. He adds a "stunning fact":

...in this crucial three-week period, preceding the nonintervention decision, the government failed to consult the French chiefs of staff on the precise nature of the strategic menace or on the kinds of operations which could be mounted against it.¹⁵

The last prevailing argument is that the British government forced nonintervention on France. "Rightly or wrongly," wrote Pierre Cot, "it looked as if the non-intervention policy would be the only way of preventing England from aiding Franco."¹⁶ On the other hand, others, such as the British Minister in Paris, Hugh Lloyd Thomas, confirmed this rumor was government-directed, to "appease the hostility of the extreme elements within their country, which looked like getting them into international complications."¹⁷

This thesis will answer the above questions in an attempt to assess the major reasons for Blum's response to the Spanish Civil War.

CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Origins of French Nonintervention
in the Spanish Civil War

I remember once saying to Arthur Koestler, "History stopped in 1936," at which he nodded in immediate understanding. We were both thinking of totalitarianism in general, but more particularly of the Spanish Civil War.

— G. Orwell¹

"The Spanish affair had for me the character of a veritable theatrical coup," recalled Leon Blum, the Socialist head of the Popular Front in France, elected just forty days before the outbreak of Civil War in Spain.² The Spanish Civil War was to become the central foreign policy issue of the Popular Front in the years 1936-1938. Minister of Aviation, Pierre Cot, later interpreted the unfolding crisis to have been "the first act of the European war."³

In 1936, a general election in Spain brought to power the Frente Popular, a coalition government of the left similar to that of France. Spain, however, lacking the Republican tradition of France and only precariously maintaining a democracy since 1931, began to experience instability.⁴ A military uprising, long in preparation, ignited on the immediate pretext of the assassination of a rightist leader on July

13, 1936. On July 18, General Franco flew to Morocco to assume command of the rebel forces, and on the same day, Moroccan troops began to arrive on the Spanish Mainland.

On Monday, July 20, Blum found a yellow telegram on his desk from the Spanish head of government, José Giral: "Surprised by dangerous military coup, ask you to arrange immediately with us supplies of weapons and planes. Fraternally yours, Giral."⁵

The request was not problematic. A legitimate government was under siege.⁶ In addition, the Laval government had signed a trade agreement with Spain "providing for the delivery of French war materiel to Madrid up to the value of 20 million francs."⁷ Between July 20 and 22 Blum had met with Minister of Defense Edouard Daladier; Pierre Cot; Yvon Delbos, Minister of Foreign Affairs; and with Vincent Auriol, Minister of Finance. All agreed to comply promptly with the request, noting the danger that would arise from a new fascist state in Europe.

Ambassador Cardenas, a supporter of the Franquists, resigned when he learned the French government was to send planes and ammunition to the Republicans.⁸ Already, the French senate was beset with "serious emotion" against sending the arms, because of the "precedent it would set" for other nations to likewise embroil themselves in the conflict, noted the adjunct director of political affairs to the Quai d'Orsay, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹

Once Cardenas had violated the Popular Front's secrecy, the rightist press reacted to the news with predictable hostility. L'Action Francaise and L'Echo de Paris had already taken the side of

the Catholic and anti-Communist rebels. "Will the French Popular Front dare to arm the Spanish Popular Front?," demanded L'Echo de Paris.¹⁰

While the news of the Popular Front's sale of Potez planes to the Spanish government reached the Parliament and the press, Blum had left for London on July 22 to discuss Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland, and the Belgian request to drop out of the Locarno agreements and declare neutrality. A French reporter, Pertinax, asked Blum whether he was going to send arms to Spain. When Blum replied in the affirmative, Pertinax warned, "You know that that is not well viewed here."¹¹ Although Spain was never officially discussed at the talks, eleven years later, Blum told the Parliamentary Investigative Commission that Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, Anthony Eden, privately cautioned him to be "prudent."¹²

Blum returned to Paris the evening of the 24th to find the political climate in France had changed. Both the leftist and rightist press expressed their own positions on the civil war in Spain and on the extent to which France should react. The representatives in Parliament also voiced their concerns. French workers greeted Blum with an "ovation" at the airport, singing the "Internationale" with raised fists, noted the Socialist newspaper, Le Populaire.¹³ The President of the Senate, Jules Jeanneney, however, was more somber:

How can you do that? No one here understands. It is not a political question, we are not looking for an excuse to oppose you, but the idea that you are getting us involved in an enterprise of which we know not the consequences, the idea that we might be led into a war for Spain, while last March 7, we hesitated and finally retreated when the issue involved military reoccupation of the Rhineland, a

more direct and immediate issue of security to France, that is something here no one can understand. On what conditions will you get involved there? We know in London — I do not say your position is disapproved — but we know here that if there were to be any international complications by our intervention, England would not support us.¹⁴

The President of the Chamber, Edouard Herriot, likewise warned Blum not to "meddle" in Spain's affairs.¹⁵

On Saturday, July 25, Blum held the first of three cabinet meetings on Spain. It became more and more difficult for him to proceed with the open arms sales in the face of mounting opposition. The hesitating cabinet discussed the possibility of discreet arms sales through Mexico. According to Jimenez de Asua, assistant to the new Ambassador, Britain was pressuring France to remain neutral.¹⁶ Ambassador Alvaro de Albornoz and Fernando de los Rios, however, were convinced that Blum must remain in office, and proposed tearing up the check already submitted in payment to the Ministry of War, in Blum's presence. Asua opposed this, explaining that a socialist opposition in Parliament would be much more influential than the Socialist presence in the coalition government. The Ambassador and de los Rios eventually won, however. The Spanish diplomats were not as unanimous in wanting to keep Blum in power as some historians have tried to argue.¹⁷

Negrin, the leader of the Spanish Republic, gives a different account. According to him, the French "informed the Spanish Government that their (the Popular Front's) resignation would depend on what we (the Spanish government) considered most useful and most

favorable for our struggle and our cause," The Spanish government ministers discussed the possible consequences of a Blum resignation.

Everyone — except for me (Negrin) — was convinced that the war would last for a few days, or at most for a few weeks. Everyone — myself included — believed that the replacement of the Blum government could be fatal for us, less because of the difficulties in obtaining arms...than because of the consequences which a cooling, or worse a reversal of France's sympathetic attitude toward Spain might have on the international situation, which might, in a short time, produce the strangling of the Republic. Later, when we learned that the solution had been in accordance with our wishes, we breathed freely and commented on our narrow escape.¹⁸

With or without the nonintervention proposal, Lacouture concludes, "What remains is the uncertainty that in the eyes of most of the Spanish Republicans, uncertain friends in Paris were better than opponents."¹⁹

According to Cot, "The possibility of denouncing the treaty which allowed the Spanish government to buy arms in France was never considered for a moment at the meeting of July 25."²⁰ If so the following day's cabinet press release contradicts him:

The French government, after the deliberations of the cabinet, has unanimously decided not to intervene in the internal conflicts of Spain. This position, proposed by M. Yvon Delbos, was unanimously approved. Finally, on the question of the supply of war materiel which the Spanish government is said to have requested, it was declared in official circles at the conclusion of the cabinet meeting: it is false that the French government has affirmed its determination to follow a policy of intervention.²¹

The Spanish government "is said" to have requested? The communiqué implies an armed "intervention" Spain was not calling for. The

cabinet resolved, according to Cot, to use the eight-day period necessary for collecting the shipment of arms requested by the Spanish government, to debate on foreign policy in the Chamber, and so that England might learn of the true danger of a fascist government in neighboring Spain.²² Foreign Minister Delbos, however, conscious of British and Parliamentary objections, became a bona-fide supporter of partial nonintervention. On July 26, the day after the cabinet meeting, he sent a telegram to Vincent Auriol, the Finance Minister, forbidding all exports of war materiel to Spain.²³ The first steps toward an all-inclusive policy of nonintervention had been taken.

On July 30, news reached the Quai d'Orsay that two Italian planes secretly headed to aid Franco were accidentally found east of Morocco.²⁴ Some were apparently ordered July 17, before the uprising.²⁵ Blum felt more "at ease"; this proof of intervention freed him from rightist warnings that Italian action was provoked by French aid to the Republicans.²⁶ He went before the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate announcing that if Germany and Italy overtly aided the rebels, France would continue to sell arms to the Republicans. But instead of assuring the Popular Front "freedom of action" (since Italy had "started it"), the Parliament and the rightist press remained violently against selling arms. Charles Maurras of L'Action Française argued that the intervention of other countries in Spain gave France no right to similarly intervene and provoke international war. He and other reporters, from the left as well as the right, feared an ideological conflict of the "whites and the reds" in Spain would provoke and highlight the dissensions within each European country.²⁷

On August 31, the deputies debated, some claiming the rebel generals "were fighting the attempt to sovietize their country."²⁸ At the second cabinet meeting of August 1, Delbos informed Blum that the British still preferred the Franco forces, and that in the name of Anglo-French amity, they advised that strict neutrality be observed.²⁹

While Blum continued to assert, "Our duty requires that we aid our Spanish friends, whatever the consequences of this support may be,"³⁰ a compromise was eventually proposed whereby France would retain some "freedom of action" to send shipments if the Germans and Italians continued to intervene. Delbos proposed to send out an appeal to the European nations which would lead to the adoption of "common rules of nonintervention."³¹ This plan had first been formulated by Alexis Leger of the Foreign Office. Leger felt it was "the best available insurance against the spread of the conflict."³²

The British replied favorably on August 4, asking that all the European powers be incorporated into this agreement. France only received a "vague" response from Germany on the 5th, and Delbos advanced a new rewording that all governments prohibit "direct or indirect exports, reexportation and transit, going to Spain, Spanish possessions and Spanish Morocco, all arms, munitions and materials of war, as well as aircrafts, assembled or disassembled, and all warships."³³

At the same time the diplomats were formulating the nonintervention policy, Cot, Daladier, and Jules Moch continued to send arms and planes to Spain over Delbos's authority. Blum was trying to persuade his colleague of the British Labour Party, David

Noël-Baker, to attempt in turn to influence the British admiralty of the danger of a Franquist victory to both countries. Blum also sent Admiral Darlan to attempt to convince Lord Chatfield, First Admiral, of these dangers and to propose France and Britain mediate between the two sides in Spain. Chatfield said he was unaware of Darlan's strategic information. While wanting to keep channels open to any new information, he rejected Darlan's proposal.³⁴

Darlan, in his account, said he told Chatfield that neither fascism nor communism would be favorable in Spain; "the best solution for Anglo-French interests would be a democratic government in Madrid, inclusive of different elements of the population."³⁵ Yet Chatfield on his side recorded Darlan to have said "anxiously" that France "did not wish either a Fascist or Communist Government in Spain, yet one or the other seemed inevitable (emphasis mine)."³⁶ Evidently, conservative Britain and the Popular Front perceived the ramifications of the Civil War differently. The British essentially sought neutrality.³⁷

The failure of the Darlan mission had a "considerable influence" on Blum.³⁸ He had another reason to feel "abandoned": only Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union sympathized with the Loyalists to the point of considering active aid. French public opinion, as the press reflected, became more deeply divided. By the third cabinet meeting on August 8, Blum was tempted to resign, but was urged to remain in power by de los Rios and Asua.³⁹

On August 7 Sir George Clerk, British Ambassador to France, spoke with Delbos to review plans for nonintervention. At that point no clear word had yet arrived from Germany, and Delbos said in view of

the "already known provision of Italian aircraft to the insurgents and of the despatch of twenty-eight German aeroplanes from Hamburg to the same destination," France would go through with sending out the five Dewoitine aircraft already ordered. Nevertheless, Clerk warned Delbos that Britain could not guarantee her involvement if France were sucked into the Spanish war:

I concluded the interview by expressing the hope that the French Government, even though, pending an agreement of nonintervention, they might feel themselves precluded from stopping private commercial transactions with Spain would do what it could to limit and retard such transactions as much as possible. I asked M. Delbos to forgive me for speaking so frankly and I repeated that all I had said was entirely personal and on my own responsibility but I felt that in so critical a situation I must put before him the danger of any action which might definitely commit the French government to one side of the conflict and make more difficult the cooperation between our two countries which was called for by this crisis.⁴⁰

Clerk had a marked affect on Delbos, as he revealed on August 7, at the fateful third and final cabinet meeting on intervention that summer.⁴¹ The cabinet became firmly divided, with Delbos on the one hand convinced of the wisdom of nonintervention, and Cot as firmly against it. Delbos now proposed suspending, "without exception," commercial as well as military aircraft to Spain. He sent such an order to Auriol on the 9th and never rescinded it.⁴² The meeting with Clerk and the failure of the Darlan mission left Delbos with no illusions about British support for France should she become involved in a conflict over Spain. He was now committed to total nonintervention. He even threatened to resign and provoke a ministerial crisis if the plan was not adopted.⁴³ For all intents and

purposes the embargo had now become a unilateral French action. Many critics have seen the embargo itself as intervention.⁴⁴

On August 15, the policy was officially endorsed by Great Britain but Germany and Italy vacillated, buying time to continue maneuvers in Spain. Ironically, Germany eventually signed the agreement because she did not think she could compete against the combined forces of France, Britain, and the USSR.⁴⁵

Delbos reasoned the fascists could intervene more effectively. Why did he think so? In the London Times, some months before leaving office in 1938, Delbos explained it was "known that the British government, which had hardly initiated its gigantic rearmament program, was determined to pursue a policy of strictest neutrality. But although determined neither to follow nor support France by furnishing arms, it was prepared to join with her in the enforcement of nonintervention."⁴⁶

A European Nonintervention Committee was established in September in London to enforce the policy. It attempted to devise schemes for supervising an arms embargo on Spain that could be observed by all interested powers. But the deliberations were unproductive. The Committee, historian Dreifort writes, "merely served as a useful diplomatic safety valve and a smoke screen behind which intervention occurred."⁴⁷ Mussolini especially made no secret of the arms and "volunteers" he was sending to Spain.

The policy of nonintervention predictably began to fall apart, having been violated from the start. A German ship, the Kamerun, was attacked by the Spanish coast guard and forbidden to dock on August

18; to France's and Britain's relief, Germany did not retaliate. Blum began to be harassed at Popular Front rallies for not materially supporting Republican Spain. Cries of "Blum to action" interspersed Blum's speech in Luna Park on September 6, the day news was received that Nationalist troops destroyed the Basque town of Irun on the Spanish/French border.

In the winter of 1936-37, the British and French governments officially prohibited "volunteers" from going to Spain, but this also proved ineffectual. Rumors circulated of German presence in Morocco in January 1937. In Delbos's absence, Pierre Vienot convened the chiefs of staff to prepare for a possible military response. Britain and the United States approved this firm stand and Hitler backed down.⁴⁸ Blum was to remain "convinced" that "the risks of war were real" — particularly referring to the Kamerun and January incidents as well as to the later bombing of the Deutschland and the German retaliation by the bombing of a Republican town late in the Spring of 1937. "If the risks of war were avoided," he stated, "it is in a large measure due to the lessening of international tension by our initiative of nonintervention."⁴⁹

In the Spring of 1937 Blum called for "relaxed nonintervention": "We voluntarily and systematically closed our eyes to the contraband of arms."⁵⁰ Still, the French contraband was not nearly comparable in volume to the German and Italian aid. On June 19 a fourth incident occurred. Hitler announced that Spain tried to torpedo the cruiser Leipzig. In the middle of this crisis and exchange of accusations, the Blum government fell. The immediate reason for Blum's resignation lay

in his disagreement with the conservative Senate over his proposed economic policy to counter the new fiscal crisis. However, "It was the international tension as much as anything else," Blum maintained, that deterred him from an all-out fight with the Senate.⁵¹

The Radical Daladier-Bonnet leadership of the still lingering Popular Front joined Britain in reaffirming nonintervention. Soon after the Anschluss, the extension of German control over Austria, the short-lived second Blum ministry of March 1938 began to advocate military aid to the Republicans, but it was too late. Barcelona and then Madrid, in March 1939, fell.

CHAPTER 2

Léon Blum

If one were to write the intellectual history of our century...in the form of a biography of a single person, aiming at no more than a metaphorical approximation to what actually happened in the minds of men, this person's mind would stand revealed as having been forced to turn full circle not once but twice, first when he escaped from thought into action, or rather having acted, forced him back into thought.

— H. Arendt, Between Past and Future ¹

"Have I changed in three months?," Léon Blum implored the restless crowd of French workers that wondered about the Popular Front's commitment to Spain's legitimate Republic. The day that he could no longer reconcile his two duties as head of government and as militant Socialist, he answered that day in Luna Park, September 1936, was the day he could no longer in good conscience remain in power.² How did Blum ideologically reconcile the socialist imperative of international worker solidarity, with his obligation as France's democratically-elected leader to national security? Was Blum prepared in his own mind to aid the Spanish government at the risk of internal and external dissension and war? In other words, were there

ideological precedents to Blum's justification for nonintervention? If so, were they still relevant to 1936? Or if Blum did sacrifice his Socialist principles, was it by choice or by reluctant submission to outside opposition?

Appeasement, an over-used, all-encompassing word, has never had fewer than two connotations: 1), a peaceful settlement of legitimate grievances through calculated but well-intentioned compromise or 2), a slavish abandonment of principles and interests in the face of terror and threats.³ If the France of 1936 could have afforded to run the risks of war, confident that Hitler could be defeated, charges against Blum's moral cowardice could be warranted. If such were not the case, if the conviction that France could not defeat Germany grew with the approach of war, then Blum's efforts might be seen in a more favorable light. It is to this latter possibility that this thesis and this chapter turn, and to the relationship between Blum's principles and how they affected, or were affected by, the varying perceptions of the fascist threat in Spain.

At first, Blum strongly supported selling the requested arms to the Spanish Republic. But with mounting opposition in conservative circles at home and in Britain, among pacifists on the Left, and in the Popular Front cabinet, Blum resorted to negotiating with Hitler and Mussolini. To the Left he argued that if the legitimate government were aided, the fascist rebels would get much more aid from Germany and Italy; besides, France could not renege on an agreement that Germany, Italy, Britain, and France, as well as the Soviet Union, had signed to insure the peace of Europe.⁴ At the same time, the

center and Right were pacified for the time being when he said the initiative was French, that it prevented an isolated and divided France, and that he himself was a patriot.⁵ In this light, Blum skillfully justified (at least until 1938, when the Anschluss of Germany and Austria convinced Blum of Hitler's intentions) a very controversial policy before a polarizing France. He did so not out of an evolutionist belief in "class collaboration," or "sacred union" as some on the Left have suggested,⁶ nor out of Kerensky-like weakness as the Right had maintained,⁷ nor out of ideological blindness and naivete, as Colton and others have accused. As we will see in this chapter, Blum was part of France's Socialist tradition, which considered itself the legitimate offspring of the French Revolution. Socialism and Republicanism had always been compatible and correct to Blum. They were part of the faith of revolutionary France in the justice of social democracy and in the moral leadership of a politically liberated proletariat.

Internationalism and patriotism were also reconcilable to Blum. The development of liberty, equality, and fraternity within each nation would both precede, and coexist with, a League of Nations. "That international organization," he said in 1917, "will rest on an ensemble of free nations, by free will, preserved in their integrity and in their development by general accord, by collective strength."⁸ Peace, then, was not the primary value over national security. National security rested in the defense of liberties within one's nation. A free nation would lead to the eventual federation of all free nations. Therefore, internal dissension, to Blum, was inextricably linked with international tensions.

What did it mean for Blum to be a Socialist before 1934, before the Rassemblement Populaire? Blum's commitment to Socialism in France actively began with his support of Alfred Dreyfus. The explosive Affair divided intellectuals and polarized households; it pitted Republicans against the militarists, monarchists, the Church, and antisemites. A similar split of Left and Right was to mark France during the Spanish Civil War, among other issues during the Third Republic. Although Blum himself played a minor role in the Affair (as a lawyer), he met the person who was to be the most important influence of his political and ideological life: the great humanist, Socialist leader, Jean Jaures.⁹

In his Nouvelles Conversations de Goethe avec Eckermann (1897), Blum characterized Goethe's "second Faust" as a Socialist agitator, in the manner of Jaures:

I gave Faust eloquence, radiance, that magnetic power that, in a crowd, everyone believes, and despite oneself, in his force, sincerity and goodness. I made him energetic and candid. He is an optimist; he believes that man is just, that only poverty and advanced civilization led him astray and corrupted him. To conquer, he only appeals to the most elevated sentiments of the heart.¹⁰

The twenty-three-year-old Blum seemed to be the Eighteenth Century man of reason and objectivity, looking up to the elite "men of the race of Herder."¹¹ Born in a middle class background, his social consciousness was sparked more by the philosophes than by poverty, though he grew up on the bustling and strongly Republican rue Saint-Denis in Paris.¹² Yet his Socialist vision was essentially quite simple: "true equality lies in the exact connection between each

individual and his abilities," regardless of wealth and social order.¹³ Blum linked democracy and Socialism all his life. He used the same phrases in A l'échelle humaine over forty years later; in the "democracy of tomorrow" all jobs are "equally noble, since all are equally useful."¹⁴

Ironically the danger, the Achilles' heel, of Blum's Faust, was a shrewd inventor who knew that "in our society, science creates unemployment." A new invention leads to workers' riots, induced by Mephistopheles, and the bourgeois parliament refuses to listen to Faust's proposals. Yet Faust accepts his lot and never trades his noble suffering in the name of a just and more egalitarian future society.¹⁵ "Goethe" believed that Faust would ultimately succeed. Almost the same happened to Blum in power.

In Blum's (or "Goethe's") evaluation of the controversial leader Bismarck, we again see the admiration of the "man of the race of Herder" maintaining personal integrity. But this integrity is in the context of Bismarck's pragmatism in a changing world, not vis-a-vis Socialist principles.

He was a man free of prejudices and resentments, who was never limited by dogmas, who always penetrated things with direct, impartial, and practical vision, but who nevertheless remained human. He was a man of peace, having retarded war for twenty years, and having reduced bloodshed to the minimum. He was moderate in victory. The evolution of his will was admirable in its constant correspondence to the movement of life. No one surrendered more piously than this brutal master of history to reality and its necessities and laws.¹⁶

Could the simultaneous admiration for a Jaurès and a Bismarck shed light on Blum's behavior as a Premier and Socialist in 1936?

Both Jaurès and Bismarck, in Blum's estimation, retained a certain core, a certain personal belief in humanity and peace, despite the fact that one was principled and the other pragmatic. To understand this is to understand what confuses many historians: why Blum was convinced that he could deal with Hitler and Mussolini by "challenging their honor(!)" with the nonintervention pact.¹⁷ First, he certainly had no illusions about Nazi Germany, but he did know its leader had to be somehow accountable to his people. Jaurès had written

There was never a democracy, however pacifist, that could form if it did not guaranty national independence. There was never a nation, however militaristic, that could constitute or save itself if it did not appeal in some measure to the revolutionary forces of liberty.¹⁸

In the same way, Blum addressed the men of the Vichy regime, who accused him of "dreams" of disarmament, that no people, "even in the totalitarian regimes, would fight unless they were assured all had already been attempted to preserve peace." The advantage of rallying the people was greater in a democracy, since the people had a stake in the regime. In 1936, new military credits had passed "unanimously"; thus for Blum, the French Republican and Socialist principle of a "nation united" was the only legitimate way to combat the Hitlerian menace.¹⁹

Secondly, Blum had faith in "collective security" as a moral force of nations united against Germany through the arbitration of a League of Nations. His remonstrations against the Hoare-Laval agreement in December 1935 demonstrated that peace for him could not be guaranteed any other way; justice among nations should be as

justice among individuals.

Peace is only possible on a basis of equality of rights and justice among nations, on the basis of arbitration and mutual assistance, on the basis of the magnificent concept that the aggressor against one nation becomes the enemy of all.²⁰

And what if justice among nations did not, in reality, reflect the laws of civil justice? Blum never fully explained. In this sense he shared in the moral despair and disillusionment of the interwar years. Unfortunately, the morality and respect between enemies on paper in pre-World War I Europe, as the film Le Grand Illusion despaired, was no longer a widely held value by 1936.

Blum's belief in socialism as a moral force, "almost as a religion,"²¹ comes from his Jewishness and from Jaures. The Jewish Messiah is Justice, Blum wrote in the Nouvelles Conversations. Unlike Christians who hope in the next world, Jews are concerned with this world, with giving "each his due." "Is that not the spirit of Socialism?" He adds, "The Bible says: a just person — when the Evangelist says: a Saint."²² To Jaures, socialism was also more than an economic doctrine, in the same way that the "patrie" was more than an economic entity, as Marxists conceived it; it was God that guided Joan of Arc, not economic determinism.²³ In the same way, the French Revolution of 1789 was more than the drive for property. The workers rioting in the faubourgs of Paris knew very well they were not each fighting for a piece of land. What the Revolution gave them was "the conscience of their dignity and their strength, and of the vast possibilities of action that would result, in a full democracy, from their proud work." They knew their action, continued Jaures, would

have an effect for the future, and they rejoiced in the present.²⁴

Blum likewise invoked the Revolution in his appeal to the young people of France, To Be a Socialist. "Your salaries are never representative of the full value of your work." But during the Revolution, the special privileges for the few had been abolished.²⁵

In the early years of the Third Republic when Jaurès wrote and when monarchism was still a strong political force, to be a republican was a faith, more than it is today. A Republic in France assured the workers a voice, a way to "conquer" power, to achieve liberty and dignity, as well as "economic harmony."²⁶ Thus for Jaurès, republicanism was the opposite side of the Socialist coin. Jaurès's innovation was to humanize the "patrie", which held the "roots of human existence."²⁷

In addition, Jaurès gave Republican France a mission:

The only social role that France can fulfill in the world, the only one that can give its actions universal value and exalt the souls of the French with a superior emotion, where the life of France and the life of humanity vibrate, is to aid, in France, by all the strength of republican democracy, the advent of labor over property.²⁸

Jaurès criticized the ambiguous phrase "the workers have no homeland." In France in the late Nineteenth - early Twentieth Centuries, the working classes were kept outside the social order, were not part of the definition of the "state." The Commune of 1870 was the most serious and bloody protest in France against this situation. Therefore to affirm that the proletariat had no homeland at that time was to actually negate the gains of the French revolution, to "paralyze" the working class and democracy, and to protect the bourgeoisie. He quoted Marx:

Without doubt the proletariat must first conquer political power, rise up as a national sovereign class and constitute itself as a nation; in this sense it is still attached to a nationality. But no longer in the bourgeois sense.²⁹

How does the proletariat constitute itself as a nation, if the proletariat does not even have a voice within the state? Marx's revolution was evolutionary, Jaurès concluded. one could easily substitute "the bourgeoisie had no homeland" if the subject were France before 1789. Therefore the Revolution of Europe would not immediately be a communist one, but a democratic and bourgeois revolution that would rid Europe of feudalism and pave the way for the proletarian conquest of power.³⁰

Jaurès also saw no contradiction between proletarian socialists and internationalists in the organization of national defense. "War above all renders impossible regular social evolution."³¹ But to rid all military castes and financial circles from all nations, enhancing democracy within a country, is to serve not only the International and the universal proletariat, but the patrie itself.

It is in the International that the independence of nations finds its highest guarantee; it is in the independent nations that the international has its most powerful and noble organization.³²

An army, then, must emerge from the people as a whole, "the nation armed," rather than a military elite, whose corruption in France the Dreyfus Affair had uncovered. Jaurès wrote a voluminous and detailed study on The New Army.

Central to this study of Blum's principles and whether his application of Jaurès in the 1930s was anachronistic is the question:

was there anything in Jaurès's opinion that would allow France to intervene in the affairs of another state? Jaurès viewed the rapprochement in 1903 between France and England, along with France's treaties with Russia and Italy, as "liberating," leading to federations in the future.³³ However, alliances of two powers against two others threaten war. For example, Jaurès, in a news article, noted the potential danger of the conflicting allegiances of France and England during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, the first with Russia, and the second with Japan.³⁴ However it is difficult to find any situation in Jaurès's time comparable to the dilemma Blum faced of whether or not to support the Spanish government. The conflict between imperialisms of 1914 differed from the unilateral threat of Nazism.

The civil war in Morocco was perhaps the closest parallel in Jaurès's time to the Spanish Civil War. In 1903, a revolt in Morocco and a raid by Moroccan Berbers on French troops patrolling the Algerian frontier gave France the occasion for intervention. Jaurès, who never requested independence for a single French colony,³⁵ reacted by saying France had "interests of the highest order" in Morocco.³⁶ However, he denounced military intervention. By undertaking a military expedition, France would surrender her "role as mediator in maintaining peace in the world." He explained that since the Moslem nations acted as a bloc, France's "moral and economic action" in Morocco would bias the neighboring nations in favor of France — what he called "pacific penetration." The Moroccans would reciprocate the friendly trade offers by extending French influence.

In 1905, France sent an expedition against raids in Morocco. A while later, the visit of the Kaiser to Tangier threatened a war between France and Germany. Jaurès accused the Delcasse government of having antagonized the German government, although he did not excuse German militarism. France should negotiate a settlement with Germany like that arranged with England.

Patriotism demands that diplomacy remove every equivocation and prevent, by frank explanation, all possible conflicts.

He concluded that opposition to intervention should be put forth by both countries, and welcomed the other European powers as well to contribute to a conference on the "International Organization of control and guarantee."³⁸

If such cooperation did not occur, Jaurès nonetheless considered France's security against an aggressive Germany most crucial. Jaures fought for peace, but he also preached a concrete form of patriotism based on the resolution to defend France against attack; to ensure her security by means of a national militia and the Triple Entente; to restore the lost provinces; to further France's prestige in China, Morocco, and the Near East.³⁹

Jaurès was assassinated on the eve of World War I, just as he was appealing for peace and mediation when the crisis in the Balkans erupted. "What would he have done had he been among us? What would he have been during the war?," Blum asked in a lecture on July 31, 1917, the third anniversary of Jaurès's death. He answered with assurance:

About his attitude in the beginning, the days following the assassination, there is no possible doubt. He hated war. All of his activities for the preceding fifteen years had been directed toward preventing it... He would thus have carried out to the end the effort for peace. He would have needed to be completely sure that, on our side, everything that it was possible to do or to attempt to prevent universal catastrophe had really been done or attempted. Those who lived with him during the last days know how imperious, how troubling was this need of his conscience. But they also know that the need had been satisfied.

Confronted with certainty, with the irreparable, he would not have doubted for a single instant that war had been unleashed by others, and that the German government was indeed a criminal government that had to be overthrown by war, from the moment that it was not overthrown by the revolutionary struggle of the German proletariat... He would have done what we have all done. He would have cooperated in the national defense...and would have become its leader.⁴⁰

Whether Jaures would have decided to participate in the war effort or not, the Socialist Party in France was divided on the question of "class collaboration". For many socialists in 1914, as for Blum, the hope for a lasting peace fell with the collapse of the German proletariat. Most French Socialists responded as citizens of a nation under attack. Others clamored "revanche" for Alsace-Lorraine. Still others thought the war would finally end bourgeois rule. Blum served as chef de cabinet under two Socialist leaders in the government. The "sacred union" began to fall apart by 1916, when France was losing badly and when revolution was threatening in tsarist Russia. But Blum was convinced of the compatibility of patriotism and socialism.⁴¹

To Blum World War I demonstrated how fragile even so sizable a

German Socialist Party was, if "it did not rest on political liberty, on a republican regime" like France.⁴² Blum's militancy at this time is striking; it was not the conciliarism of a later time, Lacouture argues.⁴³ Blum described his interpretation of Jaurès further:

He knew ... that in today's capitalist regime...social revolution can never be conceived in an isolated nation...and when other nations are not won over by propaganda... The French Revolution itself only succeeded because of the democratic sympathy of peoples on which Jaurès insisted with force and novelty, and which proceeded from the European movement of ideas in the Eighteenth Century.

Jaurès would never have doubted that the war posed a crisis of conscience before humanity — the same as Tolstoy noted in the Dreyfus Affair — and that if a crisis was resolved by a German victory, we would only find wasted human beings with which to build the future society.⁴⁴

We need the "sacred union," said Blum; if only Jaurès were still alive, he would have lifted the Party's morale, he would have "shown us the true reasons... the just reasons for war." The "just reasons for war" were to combat "industrial caesarism" in order to assure Socialism for tomorrow.

Blum emerged from the war a strong advocate of party unity and became its leader, "the inventor of a elusive Socialist center."⁴⁵ At the time he wrote To Be A Socialist, he spoke eloquently on the "vectorial sum" of Socialist ideas in flux.

The party is continually changing and evolving between two options, two fixed poles: one is the future society which we foresee, which we predict, which we bring into being; the other is the present society from whose womb we wish to draw that future society.⁴⁶

As the 1920s unfolded, the Socialist Party divided on the issue of whether to participate in the government, the old issue of labor reform through existing institutions or outright revolution. The French Communist Party was formed in December 1920 at the Socialist Congress of Tours, choosing to follow the direction of Moscow. Addressing the Congress, Blum demonstrated his adherence to the concept of the revolution in the transition from Marx to Jaures. Granted, he began, the reformists are wrong in assuming the social transformation could arise without a political crisis. But there is another error, and that "consists in thinking that the conquest of political power is an end in itself, while it is only a means," a means to the final transformation of the economic system, against bourgeois power.⁴⁷

By 1926, Blum further developed what Henry Kissinger would call fifty years later a "conceptual breakthrough" by establishing the famous distinction between the "conquest" and the "exercise" of power.⁴⁸ Blum proposed a third solution to the Socialist dilemma of participation in a bourgeois government. Before the revolution, the Socialist party should only enter government insofar as it would have control over the situation. Blum admitted that proceeding within the legal parliamentary and democratic procedures "is and always will be a particularly difficult and painful task for socialist parties" in that the masses would be still more impatient for bold action. However, a government under socialist leadership would act "with energy, resolution, and decisiveness that would not (allow) it to be stopped by the obstacles that other governments find insurmountable."⁴⁹ The

essence of "Blumism," to Lacouture, is summed up in the following letter to Maurice Sarraut in 1926. Sarraut had accused the Socialist Party of having contributed to the downfall of the Cartel des gauches, in refusing to participate in the government:

Because, in our eyes, revolutionary transformation presupposes a period of preparatory work, which will have sufficiently penetrated, molded, and adapted capitalist society, and will have insured the adequate development of socialist realities and socialist ideas; because we know that this preparatory work is dependent domestically on the protection and extension of political freedom and externally on peace, we can support the Radical program in these three areas: political freedom, peace, and social reforms. We cannot support it as useful and beneficial in itself; we can support it only as contributing to our own efforts. In this sense, according to the now classic expression, we and the Radicals can "go part of the way together." If the Radical Party vigorously undertakes the action that corresponds to its role, it will remain possible to find a sufficient number of common objectives for our concerted energies. For the Radicals, this will be the end and the goal; for us, it will be the beginning and the means.⁵⁰

Therefore, from 1921 to 1933, as party leader and deputy in the Chamber, Blum developed his own doctrine of Socialism in government, combining Jaures's ideal of patriotism with the revolutionary transformation of society that did not happen after the War. Although Blum was insulted and attacked from all sides he nevertheless strongly voiced a consistent stance on many domestic and foreign policy issues. He courageously protested the chauvinism on both sides of the Rhine while the occupation of the Ruhr was taking place. In a speech at the Hamburg Socialist Congress in 1923, Blum received "thunderous applause" for his boldness in attacking both the French and German governments, as well as for his Jauresian remarks. The coupling of patriotism and internationalism was defined as

the conviction, which is continually confirmed by experience, that in the current state of the world economy there can be no contradiction between the real, long-range interests of one pacific nation and the⁵¹ real, long-range interests of all the others.

Greatly moved, the president of the session, a former supporter of "sacred union" on the German side, praised Blum's courageous speech, a reminder of "Jaures...filled with the purest spirit of internationalism."⁵²

Hitler's coming to power in 1933 and the rise of fascist parties in Europe along with economic crisis were key turning points in the future direction of the Socialist platform in France. Jaures wrote in a time when democracy was on the rise in Europe, and organized labor was beginning to be heard, as well as when nationalist movements began to grow more influential. The Second International of 1905 condemned capitalist war. But after 1918, the trend was reversed. Fascist states rose while the democracies faltered. After the sacred union came the realization that the war did not lead to the downfall of Europe's bourgeoisie but in fact created a class of nouveaux riches.

Socialists on the right like Renaudel began to advocate joining the newly re-formed Radical government and "defend democracy" rather than oppose the capitalist regime. Blum agreed that "national defense is conceivable in a capitalist regime." But he added right away that "to go back on our traditional opposition to military budgets would deal a serious blow to peace." Such a sudden reversal would lead Europe to dangerous deductions and would foster the "psychosis of war."⁵³ At close examination, Blum was not contradicting his own past

support of the "sacred union." His opposition to military budgets came at a time when he protested the unrealistic French expectations of reparations from Germany, and when disarmament talks were in progress.

Other socialists to the right, disdainfully called "neos" by Blum, Paul Faure and the other party leaders, correctly diagnosed the mystique of fascism to the lower middle classes, but their cure was by inoculation of the disease. They cried for "Order, Authority, Nation," not social democracy.⁵⁴ Meanwhile the Center and Left of the Party reinforced its hard line against participation and rearmament.

How did the threat of a rival ideology of the right, in the French Socialist debate, affect Blum's perspective on the nature of socialist "exercise of power," if at all? Up until now, we have seen him comfortably uniting patriotism with social revolution and internationalism. France had a positive "mission" to change its own economic and social structure and to "arbitrate" among the other nations. But did Blum have to change his ideas after Hitler? Of crucial importance, was there anything in Blum's thought between 1933 and 1936 that would presage his reaction to Spain when he and the Popular Front took power? In other words, is it legitimate to argue that Blum's ideology was too unrealistic and the man too unequipped to deal with a Hitler or a Mussolini or a Franco, to maintain peace? If so, why? Or must we look elsewhere to the context of the time, of the cultural and social, political and economic trends of the 1930s, for the key to Blum's behavior?

According to historian Marcus, French socialists replaced their "messianic zeal" for a better, classless society, with a destructive

-- to the Party -- anti-fascist mystique, a sort of "faith by negation." "It produced," he wrote, "a fatal indecision over what the Socialist could do to meet it."⁵⁵

I would argue that Blum was one of the notable exceptions who recognized that the appeal of fascism was above traditional Marxist economic explanations for any phenomenon. He was less naive than the standard historical interpretation of him. Yet though I would agree with Lacouture and Droz that Blum was often unable to draw the conclusions his perceptivity would imply, the accusation of naivete ignores the very limited extent to which Blum was to "exercise power" in the coalition. The interplay of the Socialist factions during this time also limited his alternatives.

For example, Blum's views on disarmament were central to Blum's strategy between 1930 and 1935. Yet he did rearm France when he became Premier. Why? Because he saw that Europe was in fact threatened, and that collective security was the only solution and "collective security only rests on the force of arms."⁵⁶ But Blum never gave up the hope for disarmament, and even held discussions with a representative of Hitler in 1936 to discuss the possibility of arms control. His account of this meeting, before the judges at Riom, is one the most moving of his career:

I could have told (Dr. Schacht) , if I was the man you depict: "I am a Marxist, I am a Jew, I do not enter into talks with a State which has extirpated all the Socialist organizations and where Jews are persecuted." If I had said that, I would have betrayed the charges of my office. But I told him: "I am a Marxist, I am a Jew, and it is because of this that I truly desire to follow through our conversation." He answered me: Monsieur, that gives you all the greater honor." I did not ask that

compliment of him, but I took advantage of it to show him that when dealing with questions of disarmament, whether in Geneva, or Paris or elsewhere, I did so with the interests of the country in mind. At the same time, I rearmed as no other person had done. In one case after another, I fulfilled the duties of my charge, my duty as head of government. I fulfilled my duty as a Frenchman.

This shows of what Léon Blum was made. He achieved honor as a French nationalist. He suffered like his Faust, was principled, humanitarian, and hopeful like Jaurès, and pragmatic like that other statesman he admired from his youth, Bismarck. If Blum did not see the necessity of rearmament until 1936 "he cannot be faulted," as Lacouture writes, for having denounced the chauvinism of Generals Weygand and Pétain who "enclosed the French army in the most routine abdication of intelligence." Also, a man whose strategic realism and authority are more acknowledged than those of Blum, Franklin Roosevelt, revived disarmament negotiations with MacDonald and Herriot as late as 1937. And a man who left the SFIO in 1931 to be better able to devote himself to the national defense, Paul-Boncour, still made disarmament part of his "constructive plan" of 1932.⁵⁸

In Spain, Blum could have intellectually justified either intervention or nonintervention. He could have justified intervention in the Jaurèsian messianic sense — in fact Blum preferred the word "interference" at the time. Colton says Blum's faith that "the dictators would honor their signatures revealed one of his major weaknesses."⁵⁹ But is there ever a time when a humanitarian is out of place in government? Yes, but only when the humanitarian must confront others not as moral as him or herself. It was not his ideas,

or his personality that deserve the verdict of "guilty" in not aiding the Spanish Republic. Blum was part of a time and place, in a democratic society. In the following chapters we will examine the dynamic forces of France at the time of the Spanish appeal.

CHAPTER 3

French Public Opinion

I was not a king in France. It was impossible for me to envisage war without the consent of Parliament and without the consent of public opinion.

— L. Blum¹

Some historians and contemporaries of the tumultuous 1930s, including Blum himself, have maintained that had France intervened in Spain, Civil War would have exploded in France herself. Was this in fact true? If not, what led Blum to believe it was? Did membership in a particular social class affect involvement and interest in foreign affairs? In other words, were some sections of public opinion more powerful than others?

France during the 1930s was suffering from a "crise de valeurs."² The French realized that it would be impossible to return to the Belle Epoque of pre-war days. The economic crisis served to contradict the maxim that a better standard of living comes from hard work.³ As a result of the First World War, France became a debtor nation, and inflation and high prices marked the twenties. Since there was no international system to regulate floating debts, the currency values of France, Britain, and the U.S. were disproportional, leading to — at least for the French — unsynchronized devaluations. In 1928, the Poincare government stabilized the franc, to 1914 levels, but it was too high with respect to the dollar and pound, and since

French goods became expensive, unemployment rose (albeit not as badly as in the Anglo powers). France was in a depression by 1933.

In addition from 1924 to 1934, several French governments fell—with the same men coming to power every time—while the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy appeared stable. The peace established by the Treaty of Versailles seemed woefully fragile. And the French still suffered psychologically from the war and the loss of its youth.

The low morale finally exploded in the riots of the 6 of February 1934 in Paris, where Rightists, groups of war veterans, and some Communists violently protested against the Radical Socialist government. Marc Rucart, in his report on those protests in Paris, well summed up the prevailing pessimism of the day:

How can one believe in truth, beauty, goodness, under the regime of lies and hate, under this spectacle of hideous bloodshed? How can one truly believe in "imminent justice" when iniquity dominates?⁴

But who were these weary people? What, secondly, did the advent of the Popular Front mean to them? What action did each group propose for France in Spain, and how far did each group go — or could have gone — to support it?

We will start with the "petty bourgeoisie," considered the base of French society. These were primarily small shopkeepers, artisans, white-collar workers, provincial lawyers, and teachers.⁵ The interwar reconstruction created some nouveaux riches. Large and small enterprises benefitted from foreign capital and inflation in France. The petty bourgeoisie was the one group that was not severely hurt by the Depression, since it did not borrow or invest on the same large scale as big business. But it was only a matter of time before it was affected as production fell and unemployment rose. Even civil

servants were hurt by government solutions to tax them. "One result of the prolonged Depression," writes the historian Nathanael Greene "was the radicalization of workers and peasants, and the hostility of small businessmen, hit hard by the Depression, to their demands."⁶

The SFIO was composed primarily of workers, some peasants and artisans, intellectuals, white collar workers and civil servants, small-town teachers and lawyers.⁷ Its members tended to be from urban areas. However, it was the party of the rural petty bourgeoisie and the middle-of-the-road liberals, the Radical Party, that both the Communist and the Socialist Parties knew they had to capture. The middle classes traditionally believed the government must protect and defend their established interests rather than promote innovation.⁸ This made them key targets of the fascist parties.

François Goguel points out the correlation between the level of industrialization in particular regions of France and party affiliation. There is no direct correlation of peasant/conservative and worker/radical. However, he writes, while "such heavily agricultural sectors, as northwest France, or the Vendee, Mandre, Mayenne and Morbihan departments usually did vote Right, in other agricultural areas such as Creuse, Corrèze, Drôme, and the Eastern Pyrenees (the center to southeast France), the vote was Extreme Left."⁹

And among industrial regions, the Paris region and northern France, heavily industrial, voted Left, but other heavily industrial sectors voted Right, such as the Somme and Oise in the northeast, and the important Rhône and Loire regions.¹⁰ Certain political proclivities seem to cut across regional lines. Catholic France, for example, voted traditionally to the Right despite social class.¹¹

How does one explain the true "class character" of France, where the teachers were more revolutionary than the "proletarian" metal workers' union?¹² Goguel's electoral geography could still provide an explanation. He differentiated between "static" and "dynamic" France. In static France, increases in productivity were below the national average and its economic structure and ideologies retained the traditional liberalism of the Nineteenth Century. In these regions, "Socialism meant primarily a political concept, a modern-dress version of republican principles and an expression of sinistrisme."¹³ In dynamic France, where industrial production was above average, such as in the northeast and Paris, social mobility was greater and this instability, especially during the Depression, may have contributed to the radicalization of the workers.¹⁴ The demands of the First World War altered the economic geography of the country, with a continual influx of workers to the new industrial centers from rural areas.¹⁵

All of this implies that static France supported an alliance with the political party which traditionally glorified individualism, smallness and the family firm, while the federations of dynamic France demanded a strict class alignment against middle-class civilization "and its natural, if monstrous, offspring, fascism."¹⁶

Blum once asked himself how the riots of February 6, 1934 against the French Republic "could have failed; logically they should have succeeded."¹⁷ The Left succeeded, partly due to the rhetoric of a united "defensive" front against fascism, and to the Communist turn-around and overture to the Socialists on the one hand, and to the petty bourgeoisie on the other. The extreme left began to capture those regions steadfastly republican as well as "dynamic".¹⁸ The Depression had politically radicalized both the workers and the

peasantry. Masses of French workers went on strike on February 12, 1934 with one million in Paris alone.¹⁹ Another reason for the failure of the February 6 riots lay in the stability of France's democratic tradition. French conservatives — at least until 1940 — maintained their allegiance to the Republic. Unlike Italy and Germany, Greene adds, "France had built-in safeguards against fascism in her tightly structured society, the traditions of the family and individualism, and the bourgeois beliefs that buttressed the "stalelated" society."²⁰

The alliance of the middle classes and the workers brought the Popular Front to power, but the Spanish Civil War divided them again.²¹ Traditionally, France had been much more concerned with domestic than foreign politics. "While Parliament could embarrass a government, either in committee or in open session, very, very rarely was it prepared to seize on a foreign issue for the purpose of toppling a ministry."²² The order of interest in politics had been, in declining order of importance, municipal, regional, national, and finally international. This attitude explains why less than one percent of all parliamentary questions were addressed to foreign affairs, or why there was never a single debate on the question of France's role in the Council or the Assembly of the League of Nations.²³

But "it would be no exaggeration" to say that by the end of the summer in 1936, foreign affairs became the citizen's main concern.²⁴ The French workers were naturally the most solid supporters of the Spanish government and Léon Jouhaux, head of the CGT, was one of many labor leaders to urge "all democratic states, conforming to International Law" to supply the legal Spanish government "the means necessary for her defense."²⁵ Each late July and August day, Le

Populaire listed unions supporting Spain. Left-wing papers such as Le Populaire, Le Peuple (of the CGT) and L'Humanité denounced the nonintervention proposal. In Saint-Cloud on August 8, after the proposal was announced, Blum was greeted with cries of "Guns and planes for Spain!"²⁶

On September 5, Blum received a delegation of metal workers who, claiming to support Spain, warned him that they were preparing to call a one-hour strike two days later, to pressure the government to change its policy to more effective aid for Spain. Blum dismissed them, seemingly out of character for him, answering that a strike would not change the policy adopted in the general interest. Yet Blum was nervous.²⁷ He learned the Seine Socialist Federation was to call a meeting on aid to Spain in Luna-Park and, although not invited, he decided to attend. That day also coincided with the fall of Irun to Franco, further exciting public opinion. Blum's clear speech and air of authority transformed the cries of "Blum to action!" to "Vive Blum!"²⁸ "I understand you," he said, but he added France cannot risk international war, and could not renege on an agreement signed by other powers. Few in the crowd continued to question Blum's sincerity and motivations for his policy.²⁹

The Right, however, was much more vocal and united in its attacks on the Popular Front sympathy with Spain. Blum himself identified the Right with the "bourgeoisie": local assemblies, civil servants, certain newspapers, finance, and above all, the Senate.³⁰ The curious paradox of the Right is that while its members proclaimed themselves to be the true "nationalists," their hatred of Communism and fear of revolution, led them to take sides with the authoritarian states.³¹ They had genuinely feared the strikes that had intensified

with the advent of the Popular Front. Intellectuals on the Right, such as Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Pierre Gaxotte, discussed the danger of a Bolshevized Spain. The latter panicked: "French intervention in the Spanish Civil War would be the beginning of the European conflagration wanted by Moscow."³² Those who advocated the harshest measures against Germany after World War I now became her supporters. "Better Hitler than Blum" was one slogan of the day.

But the point is to ask: Why did Blum listen to the Right, which was in the minority in the French Government in 1936?

For one, the rightist press was in fact an actor in the affair. It was through the Echo de Paris that, as early as July 22, the news of the Spanish government's telegram was revealed, as well as, and more importantly, how many arms and planes were sent.³³ Henri de Kerillis of L'Echo was the first to tell Blum, when Blum was in England on the 24th, that the sale of arms was "not well seen" back home.³⁴ A confidential memo on July 25 from France's ambassador in Berlin revealed that Germany paid close attention to articles in the Liberte, the Echo de Paris, Le Jour, "etc." These articles had "insinuated the Quai d'Orsay was in disagreement" with Blum.³⁵ Could these papers have tried to provoke dissension within the cabinet, or at least to exploit the differences?

Blum's son, Robert, who was close to his father during the entire affair, maintained that Blum was firmly resolved to aid Spain. Yet he knew he would have to proceed in secret, so as not to rupture the Rassemblement Populaire. But once the center and rightist papers publicized the issue, "certain Radical leaders let Blum know their (the papers') opinion."³⁶

Protest in the rightist press was the immediate cause of the cabinet's reconsideration of selling arms to Spain on July 25. The Action Francaise led an active campaign to mobilize national opinion. Charivari, who closely collaborated with L'Action, reported:

It must be said because it is the truth: a French newspaperman has this week rendered a signal service to his country: Maurice Pujo. It was Pujo who first, with proofs and detail in support, denounced the odious deal...It was Pujo who first put a stop to execution of the bargain, who provoked the intervention of M. Henri Berenger (a Senator)... and the special cabinet announcement of Saturday afternoon.³⁷

Delbos himself indirectly corroborated the connection between the rightist press and the cabinet's decision. He informed all French Ambassadors that reports of France "lending its support to the Spanish government to combat the insurgents" were inaccurate. Delivery of war materiel to Spain (not unarmed planes) was forbidden, and reminded the Ambassadors that France did not intervene in the affairs of other nations.³⁸

Another undercurrent in Blum's struggle with the right on the Spanish Civil War, was anti-semitism. Anti-semitism, a principle element of division in France since the Dreyfus Affair, was revived with the influx of refugees in France from Central Europe.³⁹ On February 6, 1934 cries of "France for the French" rang out along with anti-communist slogans.⁴⁰ Many journalists did not hesitate to associate Franco with the Church against Bolshevism.⁴¹ Not only did Blum have to defend his patriotism as a socialist, but also as a Jew. Between the Left agitating against concessions to the fascists, domestic and international, and the Right, accusing the "unassimilable Jew" of warmongering, Blum asserted in Luna Park:

I am a Frenchman — since I am French — proud of his country, proud of her history, nourished as

much as possible, despite my race, on her tradition (Applause)... I will neglect nothing to assure the security of her defense...But, when we speak of national dignity...one of the necessary elements of national honor is the will for peace (prolonged ovation).⁴²

(Of the "since I am French," Henri Berand in the fascist newspaper Gringoire wrote sarcastically, "It is too beautiful, too beautiful... Neither Sully, nor Richelieu, nor Danton, nor Carnot, nor Clemenceau, nor Poincare, judged it necessary to produce their birth certificates. No one asked them where they came from, granted").⁴³

The Right took advantage of the Spanish Civil War to exploit its ongoing opposition to the Popular Front experiment. It accused the government of provoking war at home and abroad.⁴⁴ Self-defense groups formed that July, including the "Cagoulards", a domestic spy network. (Their false accusations in November 1936 of the Minister of the Interior of desertion during World War I led to his suicide). Those on the Left were more divided and confused. As Oreste Rosenfeld perceptively noted in Le Populaire, August 10, 1936, on the Left riots, "Peace...and planes! That combination is tragic... But who is at fault?"⁴⁵

Public opinion "quickly and fiercely mobilized" in France for each of the camps fighting in Spain;⁴⁶ the Left remembered 1934 and feared new fascist riots while the Right feared the "red peril". Blum's fear that the threat of civil war was not totally illusory.⁴⁷ In a letter to the sister of a colleague, he later wrote:

If these possibilities had become real (intervention and its consequences), civil war in France would have preceded international war. The Spanish affair took place between the 6th of February and the armistice. It was intertwined with the social crisis. As soon as the situation had become dangerously tense, we would have had the equivalent of Franco's coup in France. Before any foreign war, France would have had civil war with

little chance of victory for the Republic. That is, Spain would have been delivered. But France would have become Fascist, probably before Spain.⁴⁸

Although his analysis is perhaps over-dramatic, French history does present many examples of the danger in certain patterns of class alliances:

In the Year II, the foreign danger united bourgeois and sans-culotte because that danger was of aristocratic counter-revolution; in 1870, the French ruling classes did not have as serious a motive to resist Bismarck, and the patriotic and disinterested spirit of the popular masses in the cities did not find more than a mediocre echo in the French bourgeoisie.⁴⁹

In his A l'Echelle Humaine, the culmination of his life's work, written in 1941 while imprisoned and awaiting trial by the Vichy regime, Leon Blum criticized the power of the French bourgeoisie. "In fact, each time the will of the country manifests itself by universal suffrage,...the ruling bourgeoisie never lost a moment to eliminate it and reject it as a foreign body."⁵⁰ He may have had his frustrations on Spain in mind, as well as other examples in French history, including Vichy.

Yet to which French social group did Blum see himself responsible for once he took office? Was Blum, when he exercised power in the name of the left coalition, supposed to govern the middle classes of France, the workers of the world, or the French? One of the ironies of democracy and "public opinion" is that "the good of the whole" requires the leader to make choices. Blum chose, in the case of Spain, not to appear to be embroiling France in a partisan conflict for partisan reasons; he chose nonintervention. George Orwell hit upon the humanitarian's dilemma, a humanitarian who, when in power, chooses for the whole to live, rather than to risk civil war:

If the Spanish Civil War had been won, the cause of the common people everywhere would have been strengthened... that was⁵¹ the real issue; all else was froth on its surface.

Given Blum's beliefs that France's best interests required defense of the Republic, internal stability, and social reforms, and given the explosive nature of the Spanish Civil War issue for the French people, the Socialist Premier's commitment to nonintervention becomes clearer if not inevitable.⁵²

CHAPTER 4

The Political Parties of the Popular Front Coalition

Roughly, scholars divide into two camps when examining the origins of the French policy of nonintervention. The first (mostly British historians) emphasizes domestic politics, that Blum and Delbos found themselves limited by a divided cabinet and country.¹ To the other school, which includes more left-wing historians and apologists, the British opposition to intervention was the decisive factor.² This chapter will concentrate on the first interpretation, best summarized by Young:

To have pressed on with the original decision to aid the beleaguered Spanish government would have meant the strait-jacketing if not the fall of his administration. The Senate, without doubt, would have mounted a relentless opposition; and the wavering of many deputies, especially within the ranks of the Radical Socialists, would have imperiled the government even inside the newly elected Chamber.³

How important were the internal pressures of Blum's cabinet and coalition politics? What were these pressures? Why did Blum listen? Could parliament effectively threaten the new social reforms? Could

it have caused the collapse of the Popular Front? What type of "unity" was important to Blum and why?

The nature of the bond between the Socialists, Radicals, and the Communists was tenuous at best from the time "unity of action" was declared after the February 6, 1934 riots. Because each party had a particular interest in forming the coalition, because the parliament was dominated by the more moderate Radical Party and because intervention in the Spanish Civil War was a divisive issue for the Socialist Party itself, Blum exercised power within limits.

The Communist Party initiated the Popular Front.⁴ The Communists, ever since the schism at Tours in 1920, had consistently refused to associate with the bourgeois socialists, even on February 6, 1934, and remained a small party. In the 1932 election, only 6.78% of the population voted Communist. But by 1936, the party had changed its rhetoric to antifascism, and doubled its constituency, particularly among workers who were disenchanted with the Socialist Party's former dealings with the Radical Party in the 1920s.⁵ Suddenly, it seemed, the Communists went from a position of revolutionary defeatism, a stance against national defense under any circumstances, to patriotism.⁶ According to the Party, the international proletariat now demanded the defeat of Germany.⁷

Why did the Communists change course? Firstly, the party was attuned to Moscow which feared the rearmament of fascist Germany; the threat to the USSR was more important than class conflict. Secondly, some historians conjecture that Stalin wanted to prevent an alliance of Britain, France and Germany against an isolated USSR. The French

Communists could work against this possibility from within. And thirdly, as many in the 1930s suspected, in the event of a war of France and Great Britain against Germany, Stalin could come in and take over Europe.⁸

The Franco-Soviet nonaggression treaty of May 1933, and the mutual assistance pact signed on May 3, 1935 by Foreign Minister Laval and Soviet Ambassador Potemkin explained the Communist Party's reversal on the French rearmament effort.⁹ The Pact read:

Stalin understands and fully approves the policy of national defense pursued by France in order to maintain its armed forces at a level consistent with its security.¹⁰

Some Socialists like Marx Dormoy, and Blum to some extent, were skeptical of a unity "desired by Moscow."¹¹ However, Blum wrote in Le Populaire on July 14, 1934, a day before the "unity of action" was announced, "I knew what the word 'unity' meant for Jaures. A persistent and prudent will to maintain and tighten the unity of our Party, a persistent and bold will to direct the Party towards worker unity, that is how, in the light of his memory, appears to me our duty."¹² The two labor parties, the socialist CGT and the Communist CGTU reunited in March 1936.

However, in 1934 the Communist Party had less of an interest than the Socialist Party in structural reform of the economy since it wanted to gain the important backing of the Radical Party and the powerful bourgeois constituency it represented in the fight against fascism.¹³ The Rassemblement Populaire program of January 11, 1936 was broad enough to attract all of France's Left. Although addressing

financial and social reforms, it was a defensive program against the fascist threat: to dissolve the paramilitary fascist leagues; to maintain international peace; to maintain democratic liberties; to investigate France's colonies.¹⁴ Not until after the May 1936 election was it decided that the Socialist Party, and Leon Blum, would head the coalition.

The Communist Party did not participate in the Popular Front cabinet, and the implications were crucial to Blum's freedom of action, including the issue of Spain. It meant the balance in Blum's cabinet was more to the Radical right than it otherwise might have been. The Communist Party, according to its leader, Maurice Thorez, declined Blum's offer, because it was "convinced that the Communists will better serve the cause of the people by loyally supporting, unreservedly and without interruption, the government under Socialist leadership, rather than by offering, through their presence in the cabinet, a pretext for the enemies of the people to create panic."¹⁵ One French journalist in Moscow reported conversations he had had with Soviet civilian and military leaders on the Popular Front victory. His informants expected "a strong and united France determined to respond appropriately to Hitler." For this reason, the Soviets declared themselves in favor of a postponement of revolution. The aim was a strong and stable France able to follow through on her pact with the Soviet Union.¹⁶

The nonintervention policy sharply divided the antifascist coalition. Despite the USSR's favorable reception to the agreement, Thorez, for the Communists, demanded France send aid to the Spanish

workers.¹⁷ The Soviet government feared a France isolated on three sides from her Eastern European allies, and when it saw to what extent Germany and Italy were violating nonintervention, she began to send planes in October. The Soviet government announced "it could not consider itself bound by the agreement for nonintervention to any greater extent than any of the remaining participants." Two months later the French Communists abstained for the first time, from voting on a motion of confidence related to the French government's foreign policy. However, the Party still pledged its support to the Popular Front's other policies.¹⁸

The Communist presence in the coalition was crucial insofar as it frightened the more conservative and propertied classes in France. Blum's second ministry fell within a month in March 1938, partly because he proposed to include Communists in his cabinet.¹⁹

The Communist presence was important in splitting labor; although the unions tried to steer clear from politics, they were predominantly Socialist and Communist. After the Communist Party withheld its vote of confidence for the Popular Front's policy on Spain, Blum and his colleagues considered resigning. But the Popular Front, Blum wrote:

unanimously resolved to stay in power. We decided that an open crisis in such conditions and at such a serious moment would bind neither France nor other nations, that it would throw public opinion into trouble and confusion, that it would risk weakening the country and putting social reforms just passed into question. (He then reminded the Communist section of Parliament that) it is not only surmounting the difficulty of the hour, but of resolving it so that tomorrow, common action can be pursued with confidence and loyalty.²⁰

But historian Annie Kriegel is critical of Blum's seeming abandonment of his socialism. In 1935, the French Communists had envisioned Popular Front committees from below, analogous to the Russian soviets. Blum and the SFIO dismissed the idea and passed up the opportunity to create a unique proletarian party, a "French Front", as Thorez proposed.²¹ Nevertheless, the Communist Party's nonparticipation in the government, even though the Party proportionately received the greatest electoral gains in May 1936, and its oscillation between support and admonition for the Popular Front, do not exonerate it. As Lacouture writes, "the absence of the Communists constantly unbalanced the team and made the Radicals Blum's critics if not his jailers."²²

Blum's relations with the Radical Party were no less troublesome, and perhaps even more so, since his Minister of National Defense (Daladier) and his Minister of Foreign Affairs (Delbos), as well as the Vice Premier (Chautemps) and the Minister of the Navy (Gasnier-Duparc) and the Minister of Aviation (Cot), were all Radicals and held the highest posts in making foreign policy. The Radicals accepted the invitations of the Socialists and Communists less out of ideology than out of, as Greene summarizes, "electoral advantage, the opportunity to govern, the defense of the Republic, and the prospect of a number of reforms."²³

Most were not enthusiastic about the alliance, but they were well aware of the significance of their electoral weight, whether they swung to the Left or to the Right. Daladier took over the Party after Edouard Herriot and was affectionately known as the "bull of

Vaucluse," although he did not prove to be steadfast on February 6, 1934, when he resigned less than a day after the rightist and communist demonstrations. But a new generation of "Young Radicals," Cot and Jean Zay (later Blum's minister of Education), emerged who "refused to condemn both fascism and communism as equal threats." The Radicals, as in the past, were torn between their leftist impulses and their pocketbooks.²⁴

One might ask, given the decision of the Communists not to participate in the cabinet, should Blum have proposed, for the sake of balance, that the Radicals likewise decline? Should Blum have formed a purely Socialist government, given that a cabinet without the Communists would not have represented a true tripartite coalition anyway? This was actually proposed by two left socialists a few days after the elections. Lacouture indicates, however, that to keep Chautemps and Herriot, Daladier and Sarraut out of the government was "beyond human strength" and politically unworkable. He adds, "Although Blum the logician must have considered it, Blum the practical politician immediately rejected the possibility."²⁵

As a result, the Radical Party entered the coalition conscious that despite the greater electoral gains of the parties farther left, it held the upper hand. The powerful Senate itself was predominantly Radical, albeit conservative. Thus when the Spanish Civil War erupted, Blum was forced, because of his dependence on the Radical Party, to downplay ideology in dealing with the foreign conflict. As we have seen, neither the President of the Senate, Jeanneney, nor the President of the Chamber, Herriot, nor the President of the Republic,

Lebrun, wanted to risk international war over Spain.²⁶ Camille Chautemps likewise shared the Parliament's worries. He once took aside some young Radicals, telling them the Spanish Government would fall "like a pack of cards."²⁷ While Blum was in London on July 24, Daladier was barraged from the Chamber with questions on Spain. He received a delegation of Senators from the Right-wing Union Républicaine, led by their president, Léon Bérard, an interview which Daladier related to Blum. Bérard told a journalist that the "unanimous opinion" of his group, "an opinion shared by practically all my colleagues in the Senate, is that France's duty and interest coincided to compel her to maintain the strictest neutrality."²⁸

But it was Delbos who played the crucial, "if not decisive," role in the formation of French policy towards the Spanish Civil War. He was sensitive to British interests and consistently relayed them to Blum.³⁰

Yet how must the Radical Party be blamed? While all the noise on Spain made headlines, Cot and Daladier continued to send shipments of arms to Spain. The French government pursued two policies. Even Delbos supported, at least until August 7, selling arms as long as the fascist governments did also. He reversed Cot's policy when he learned of the strong feelings in the Senate against delivering the materiel.³¹ Many Radicals especially did not want French foreign policy to appear ideologically directed. Herriot had told Blum, "Mon grand, don't get mixed up in this affair, it would be extremely dangerous, and you cannot do it on the the basis of your politics."³²

In a 1938 article, Blum denied the comment that "certain Radical ministers" were consistently against him on nonintervention. On the contrary, wrote Blum, "their opinion was one of the determining elements" to the August 7 decision.³³ Blum seems to be lying in two respects. First, some Radicals in the cabinet, such as Cot, were in fact against nonintervention. Second, Blum assumes full responsibility for the decision, though in truth he was originally reluctant. Why did Blum respond to the comment in this way? For one, the accusation implied, to Blum, that French democracy was a "fiction". Also, the French decision-makers on August 7 had grounds to believe the international accords brought about by the nonintervention plan would be observed. In short, it should only be necessary to know that the decision was finalized by the cabinet.³⁴ To divide the Popular Front into its component parts is immaterial to Blum, since only one policy decision must emerge.

If the Radical Party was not the only determinant to Blum's policy, was Blum's own Socialist Party at all influential? What was the SFIO's influence on the policy of nonintervention? To what extent did it affect Blum (and the future of the party)?

The focus of discussion on conservative pressure on Blum has often obscured the tensions which existed among the Socialists and which were acutely felt by their leader, Blum. Even the usually thorough Colton overlooks Paul Faure, a socialist who did support nonintervention. Faure represented the very real Socialist dilemma Blum faced, of wanting to support the struggling new Republic of Spain, and also maintain domestic and foreign peace.

Blum and Faure held the diverse elements of the party together. But although the SFIO united under Blum in the Rassemblement Populaire, the increased international tension began to pull the party apart.³⁵ Both Blum and Faure, who represented the majority center of the Party still spoke of disarmament in 1933, but Blum began to advocate a tripartite defensive alliance of France, England, and Russia, in early 1935.³⁶ Faure, however, was an uncompromising pacifist; he refused to consider the use of force unless France herself was attacked.³⁷ Domestic political tensions also split the two leaders. Blum, for instance, had resolutely endorsed the general strike of February 12, 1934, called against the fascist leagues, over the objections of Faure, who feared the national guard.³⁸ In addition, "Paul Faure never forgot that he was already one of the leaders of the left of the party when Blum was still immersed in the troubled waters of the union sacrée."³⁹

The small revolutionary left of the SFIO was almost indistinguishable from the Communists. Jean Zyromski was ready to defend the Soviet Union militarily if necessary, while Marceau Pivert denounced provoking war, including with Germany. He resigned from the Popular Front government in February 1937 in opposition to the war credits passed. Never would he help "furnish arms to the enemies of the working class...The Rassemblement Populaire was not created to make the proletariat swallow the pill of military credits and national unity."⁴⁰ But he did discreetly support the nonintervention agreement because of his pacifism.⁴¹ The Spanish War was but one issue in the brief history of the Popular Front that eventually led the SFIO to a

"public split, which ruined the SFIO as a viable political party."⁴² That decisive issue was Munich and the problem of possible war in 1938.

The complexity of party disunity between 1933 and 1938 cannot be underestimated. The Popular Front was elected at a time when Socialists had to reconcile at least three important threats: the threat to the domestic peace of France, the threat to the peace of Europe, and above all the threat of rival mystiques on the Left and Right vying for the same constituencies. Marcus does not see these as reconcilable:

For the socialists, the problem of mystique vs. politique remained acute. This interplay of Socialist ideals and French politics has furthered the development of a number of distinct socialist mystiques, many of them operating within the SFIO under the appearance of a common denominator of class-war formulas. Contradictions at this fundamental level made permanent contradictions of policies virtually a necessity.⁴³

The Communists and the Radicals were better able, during the interwar period, to separate mystique from politique. The Communists clearly set their priority as anti-fascism, while the Radicals were loosely organized and distrusted doctrinaire leadership anyway.⁴⁴

In the middle, Blum was essentially groping for a justifiable unity between mystique and politique. He found that synthesis in patriotism. His rhetoric was often vague as a result. For example, he shouted over the applause, from the podium of the Place de la Nation on July 14, 1936, "The object of the Rassemblement Populaire is to furnish new reasons to defend it. That is how to revive the great revolutionary tradition. That is why the day of July 14 is at once the celebration of the Revolution and yours."⁴⁵

Although he continued to assert that the Popular Front coalition saved France from the "condition of Franco's Spain," he regretted the confusion that separated Socialism from the people, especially on the issue of national defense. In 1941, he came to believe the Party would have been better off to have openly divided, rather than to remain "internally split...condemned to powerlessness and almost silence," as it was at the eve of World War II. Between 1936 and 1938

the Party led a humiliated, suspect existence, of a sort that no one could perceive its presence. Surely, it would have been better had a frank break separated the irreconcilable elements. The event should have been the proof; the popular masses would have re-formed around those who saw clearly...To that, I had already confessed, but the religion of unity was too strong.⁴⁶

His judgment on the unity of the SFIO could apply more generally to the French Left of the interwar years. The failure of the Communists, the Socialists, and the Radicals to "see clearly," to become a Popular Front in spirit as well as in name, precluded the possibility of a strong stand on the Spanish Civil War issue. This stalemate in unity ultimately facilitated the 1940 collapse of France. Wrote Blum, "At the hour when the nation was waiting for an appeal, for a rallying cry, none was heard from our ranks."⁴⁷

CHAPTER 5

Blum and the French Military

An historian of French foreign policy, Robert Young, has recently shared striking evidence on Blum's relations with the French military:

The stunning fact is that in this crucial three-week period, preceding the nonintervention decision, the government failed to consult the French chiefs of staff on the precise nature of the strategic menace or on the kinds of operations which could be mounted against it.¹

Young concludes from this that "while prepared to justify his policy in terms of military exigencies, it seems unlikely that (Blum) was so susceptible to their dictates."² To what extent was Blum in fact influenced by the "strategic menace" of the Spanish Civil War? What "lessons" did the French military derive from the Spanish War? Did Blum exert sufficient authority over the military? If not, why not?

The Spanish Civil War had two main ramifications for French foreign diplomacy. The first was that it put new strains on any kind of French-Italian accord. The Popular Front had departed from its

ideology in hesitatingly declining to aid a fellow leftist government. Given the predicament of the Blum government, now bitterly denounced by all communists and many socialists, it was inconceivable to press on with an alliance with Italy.³

The second ramification of the Civil War, and subject of this chapter, was more strategic. Since France was to discontinue courting Italy (particularly after the announcement of the Rome-Berlin axis in the Fall of 1936), she would have to reinforce her troops on the Spanish border, at the expense of divisions against Germany, in the event of a rebel victory.⁴ Furthermore, Blum was quick to identify the threat of a tightening of communications and access lanes between France and North Africa. "Fascist" control over the Gibraltar straits by means of German and Italian naval bases in the Balearics and the Canaries was an "extremely grave danger not only for France, but for England," Blum apprised his Labour Party friend Noel-Baker.⁵ There would be no guarantee that France could ferry her North African troops, without changing the mobilization plan.⁶

These concerns led Blum and British Foreign Minister Eden to conclude that if the Spanish government won, the international situation would remain the same. If the rebels won, Franco might eject foreign troops from Spain. "Not until he proved willing to cooperate with Germany and Italy against French interests in the Mediterranean would the risks of neutrality overshadow the risks of intervention."⁷ Conversely, premature intervention would run greater risks, above all the threat of international war. Second, intervention might prejudice Franco in favor of Germany and Italy, not

lead him to evict those powers. Finally, a military operation would divert France from the far greater dangers over the Rhine.⁸ Thus the consequences of intervention appeared much more hazardous than those of nonintervention.

This scenario was influenced by the French military. It foresaw a rebel victory. André Blumel, Blum's chef de cabinet, reported to the American charge Wilson that "the opinion of the French military advisers was in general pessimistic as to the chances of the success of the Spanish Government. The Spanish Governmental forces had plenty of enthusiasm but no discipline or military order."⁹

The sympathies of the French military to either party in the Spanish war were strangely conflicting and ambiguous. After Blum told Noel-Baker of the strategic danger of a Franquist-Italian rapprochement in the Mediterranean, Noël-Baker asked, "Do you have the support of your military authorities in this regard?" Blum answered:

I don't know exactly what our army chief-of-staff thinks. I'm not sure he's totally convinced, but I can tell you, assure you, that our major general of the navy, Admiral Darlan, thinks exactly as I do...¹⁰

Two important cabinet meetings, July 25 and August 1, on the possible implications of French involvement in the Spanish Civil War, and Blum admits to being unaware of the positions of his generals!

On the armed forces, however, General Gamelin later admitted that "for reasons of sentiment and conviction, the sympathies of the soldiers were always with Franco."¹¹ But André Blumel had told Wilson that although the French army officers were "in the majority instinctively unsympathetic to the aims of the Blum government in

France, and could not by the wildest stretch of the imagination be suspected of any natural sympathy with the efforts of the Left government in Spain to put down the military revolt there," nonetheless "for reasons of a technical nature related to the problem of French security the French military and naval command were heart and soul in favor of the ultimate triumph of the Spanish Government." The "technical reasons" referred to involved the difficulties "in which France would be placed if communications with North Africa's reservoir of men and foodstuffs were cut off from continental France."¹²

It would seem, then, that the strategic imperatives of France cancelled out the military's sympathies with the rebels. If the French military could have been swayed either way, Blum must have been swayed by factors other than the views of the military, such as by domestic politics and the British influence. For instance, Pierre Cot of Aviation pointed out that the accusation of French opponents that intervention would provoke German and Italian reaction "was not only legally unacceptable but actually inaccurate"; these powers were intervening anyway.¹³ But the possibility of a Blum resignation, resulting from increasing public, cabinet and parliamentary division, and Delbos's and Gamelin's own opposition to "ideological crusading", weighed more heavily than the logic of merely being able to openly sell arms to a friendly government.¹⁴

Anti-communism also blinded the conservative British and French elements to the strategic threat of a potentially fascist Spain. The British felt that non-involvement would probably lead to a rebel

victory, and then an ouster of all foreigners, including Communists, from Spain. Sir S. Hoare explained further:

When I speak of "neutrality" I mean strict neutrality, that is to say, a situation in which the Russians neither officially or unofficially give help to the Communists. On no account must we do anything to bolster up Communism in Spain, particularly when it is remembered that Communism in Portugal, to which it would probably spread and particularly in Lisbon, would be a grave danger to the British Empire.¹⁵

The French army, sympathetic to Franco, also failed in some measure to determine the consequences of a German-Italian-supported victory. Like Britain, it counted on the rapprochement possible with Italy. To the retired general Castelnau, a hero of the First World War, the conflict in Spain was "between Muscovite barbarism and Western Civilization." He coined the term "Frente Crapular" in the Echo de Paris, "the most widely read daily paper among French officers."¹⁶ The historian William Shirer asserts, "A few planes, a few tanks, a few batteries of artillery, a scattering of 'technicians', rushed over the border, as Blum had first planned, would have enabled the Spanish Republic to quash the rebellion in a few days or weeks, before the aid from Italy and Germany, which were further away, could come by sea to save the military junta."¹⁹ Jean Zay and Pierre Cot and other Young Turks in the government inclined to this assessment. Cot said "leaving the French frontier open to the Spanish republicans would have been their salvation." The German army had only just achieved parity with the French, and Italy was still exhausted from the Ethiopian campaign the year before. A risk of World War II in 1936 rather than three years later hardly existed to

Cot.¹⁸ But General Gamelin did not even mention Spain in his voluminous memoirs until the Republican cause was all but lost in 1938. At that point in March 1938 under Blum's second short-lived ministry Gamelin finally saw the necessity of a "diplomatic means to separate Germany and Italy" from Spain.¹⁹

Irony lies in General Gamelin's priding himself before Blum on keeping the military "above politics" while Petain and Laval were beginning to "sprout the seeds of authoritarianism" in supporting Franco during the Spanish Civil War.²⁰ While Blum reassured Gamelin that he understood the "gravity" of the German threat in Europe, former Prime Minister Laval and Marshal Petain dealt secretly with the Nazi government through Salamanca. On April 13, 1937, Laval met with Franco, the German Ambassador in Spain reported.

The French statesman brought out the serious internal situation in France and the imminence of a Communist movement in that country, and stated that he was in touch with Doriot, Colonel La Rocque (leaders of two rightist parties), and Marshal Petain. ...M. Laval was of the opinion that the salvation of France lay in a Petain government and that the Marshal was determined to assume this responsibility, but that President (sic) Blum, whom he compared to Alcala Zamora, and with whom they were secretly working to this end, did not seem inclined to accept it.²¹

But, to be fair, Petain did not openly resist Blum, even at the 1938 meeting on Spain. Pertinax recalls:

Not a word did he utter against the Jew, whom he jailed, condemned and abandoned to the Nazis. Yet at the same time the Jew was importunate, repeatedly asking him, seeing that he was silent, "Are you thoroughly in agreement Marshal?...Haven't you any objections to express?" "None whatever, Mr. Prime Minister, none whatever!" And he answered in a tone of deferential regard.²²

"Obviously," adds Pertinax, "Pétain did not speak as he felt and thought." In the summer of 1936, Pétain met a former British minister, Lord Mottistone, and remarked, "We have a rotten government and I want to tell you that the French people won't fight." Pertinax remarked that Pétain did not change between 1936 and 1938; "he always stood where Anglophobia, counterrevolutionary passion, and defeatism met."²³

How much control did Blum have over the military, then? Would he have had the support of the French armed forces in Spain had intervention led to war? A French military attache to the French embassy in Madrid addressed Blum: "The King of France would have intervened."²⁴ But the sovereign of a country is not like the leader of a coalition, particularly if that leader is committed to democracy and to enhancing the credibility of the new socialist-headed government by not appearing to be militantly crusading the socialist ideology. The unknowns of intervention were too grave to risk; Blum was not bold on military aid to Spain until 1938, after the Anschluss and the fall of Guernica and Saragossa.²⁵

The military's lack of commitment to the Spanish cause may have lain not in private sympathies nor in ignorance of the strategic interest France had in a non-fascist aligned Spain but in a fear of German rearmament, and the conviction that keeping allies were the lynchpins to France's collective security. Though the Blum government did embark on a massive rearmament program, the Left's rhetoric was still disarmament and the military doctrine was still defensive. In 1935, when Paul Reynaud advocated that France change her military policy, General Maurin, the Minister of War, had answered, "When one

has spent millions to have good and solid fortifications, one does not commit the folly of going beyond these fortifications to who-knows-what kind of adventure."²⁶

Had the French military establishment believed as had Colonel de Gaulle in the breakthrough powers of offensive weapons, particularly in the hands of an enemy with superior resources, it would, on the contrary, have constituted a prediction of military disaster for France. Thus it was, writes Young, "that the high command reconsidered, then reaffirmed, its doctrine in 1936."²⁷

If nonintervention was meant to enhance France's waning prestige before her East European allies, the opposite, if any change, occurred. Poland, for example, wanted France to help subsidize her arms industry with prototypes as well as money. Blum consulted his generals and they refused to supply the prototypes. The generals also did not consider the USSR of prime strategic importance. They did not see how Russia could act directly against Germany given the wall of states between the two countries, Russia's shaky relations with Poland, and the ongoing purges of their generals. After learning of the generals' opinions on Poland, Blum, exasperated, told Daladier and Gamelin:

One cannot live this way. We are linked by an alliance with a state and a people, and we have so little confidence in them that we hesitate to deliver them arms, designs, projects, for fear they will betray us and deliver us to the enemy.²⁸

What "lessons" did the French military learn from observing the new warfare in Spain? General Armengaud wrote in 1937 that the battles in Spain "confirm our own experience (of the First World War),

the value of the dispositions we undertook to prevent a quick attack" when the war of movement turned to the war of attrition.³⁰ Instead of focussing on German speed and concentration in Spain, the generals explained the victories of the offensive there to inadequate numbers of defensive weapons or to the certain peculiarities inherent to the war in Spain. Conversely, the successes of artillery, anti-tank guns, and anti-aircraft artillery were used to confirm the correctness of the French war doctrine.³¹ General Beaufre recounts in his memoirs of an instance in June or July 1936 when British Chief of the Imperial Staff Deverell asked General Gamelin what he thought of the German tanks in Spain. Gamelin replied, "All our information indicates that our policy is the right one. The German tanks, too lightly armored, are scrap iron."³²

All the same, the battles in Spain demonstrated to Armengaud the need for a "counter-offensive on fortified lines." The principle lesson, to Armengaud, was similar to what was learned on the western Front in the last months of World War I: "Our idea is confirmed that the eventual adversary of our country will not attack, if there is no hope of surprise." In other words, the French borders must be well-organized on the defensive.³³

How did he evaluate the new air forces of Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union? The Spanish Civil War was one of the first instances of extensive air raids. Likewise, the general repeated that the defensive strategy for aviation was the lesson. The nationalist air force in Biscaye, for instance, was all-powerful "when it was not countered" by government planes and anti-aircraft defense.³⁴ What was

the message to France? To catch up in aviation. He concluded from the Spanish Civil War maneuvers, that peace in Europe lay in an "equilibrium of air forces," which must be achieved "at any price."³⁵ In a word, instead of emphasizing a positive solution to the problem of German rearmament, the French Generals (and members of Blum's cabinet) reemphasized, using the Spanish example, the deterrent value of a strong coalition defense.

The field of military economy is quite new, and although peripheral to this study, it may shed some light as to why the military behaved as it did toward involvement in the Spanish war. To what extent were the internal responses of the Blum government as well as of all other French interwar governments, predicated upon the slow progress of an industrial strategy for wartime? To what extent was government policy on Spain influenced by the export and investment interests of French armament, shipbuilding and aircraft industries?³⁶ Before the Spanish Civil War, France bought a considerable amount of iron from Spain. That market was replaced by North Africa. But in times of war, due to potential difficulties in communicating with North Africa, it would be more practical to deal with Spain. Spain also exported copper, 20,000 tons, indispensable for national defense.³⁷ A definite correlation between these interests and the attitudes of Blum and the French military is difficult to establish. But Socialist leader Paul Faure has cynically described the war materiel manufacturers as "the true internationalists." Blum does point out that the French war industrialist le Creusot tried to get Ambassador Potemkin of Russia to pressure Blum not to nationalize

French industry, promising to sell Russia more arms if nationalization did not occur.³⁸

The French military differed over Spain. Some generals were clear partisans of Franco. Others thought the risks of intervention were too great, especially since their defensive military doctrine called for elaborate border preparations, maintaining the bulk of French reserves on the German border to resist a strong Germany. Still others were content to stand pat, though noting the new offensive tank and airforce strategies, reconvincing of the need for a strong French defense.

What if the Popular Front had resigned over Spain? What would Daladier's authority as Minister of National Defense have meant to the military if the president of the Radical Party moved from government to opposition?⁴⁹ The air force, in spite of Pierre Cot, was inclined to the right. The navy, in spite of Darlan, "was the body which was soon to be the framework for the most reactionary regime in contemporary France: Vichy."⁴⁰ We know little about the army except that Marshal Petain later became ambassador to Franco. One general accused the Popular Front of encouraging laziness and "incapable commanders." Because the workers got out of hand, the former bosses unlearned the art of giving commands.⁴¹

Blum later claimed that France was "on the eve of a military coup d'état, a counterpart to the Franco coup de force. Industrial and reactionary circles, infuriated by the passage of social laws, would have utilized this (the Spanish Civil War) as a pretext (for a coup). I had a presentiment of it at the time. Since then I know it."⁴²

The French military, however, has usually been included in the long list of reactionary groups, at least from the perspective of the Spanish Civil War, than as a force to contend with in its own right. The attitude of the military toward the strategic threat posed by Spain and the generals' influence on Blum remains little known and understood. What is clear is that Blum, like the military (excluding de Gaulle), did not consider the possibility of a defensive war fought in Spain on behalf of the Spanish Republic, to counter the threat of a third fascist front on the French border.

CHAPTER 6

The British Influence on French Nonintervention

The outcome of the Spanish War was settled in London, Paris, Rome, Berlin — at any rate, not in Spain.

— G. Orwell¹

The extent of British influence on the decision of the French Premier Léon Blum not to intervene on the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War is perhaps the most controversial issue in the study of Blum's action as a statesman. Revisionists have reexamined the diplomatic papers of the time, made publicly available in the last twenty years, and have found that the allegations of British coercion were excuses to divert attention from the tense domestic politics. As Young writes, if Britain swung the French decision-makers, it was more as icing on the French gateau.² But this interpretation still does not answer the question of how important was the issue of British support, and how did Blum interpret and respond to British pressure. Blum himself always assumed the responsibility for the nonintervention agreement.³ On the British side, the Secretary of the Foreign Office Anthony Eden, likewise denied the French acted on his government's

directive, and added, "I should have been glad to say that nonintervention was my proposal, as I considered it the best which could have been devised in the circumstances."⁴

Other witnesses, however, such as Pierre Cot, stressed the importance Blum and Delbos attached to strengthening the British alliance and to the almost "unconscious reflection" of British sympathy to the rebels. "Rightly or wrongly," Cot explained, "it looked as if the nonintervention policy would be the only way of preventing Hitler from aiding Franco."⁵ But would England have isolated France had an international conflict arisen?

Whom do we believe, Blum, Eden or Cot? First, Blum's goals for better Anglo-French relations will be examined. Next, we will see why Britain harbored reservations on intervention. Finally, we will seek to determine whether Blum and France could have proceeded to act on their own initiative, if Blum had done this, and why.

France just after World War I was "the greatest power on the continent of Europe," remembered Shirer.⁶ She was rich, maintained a proud army on the Rhine and controlled colonies in parts of Africa and Asia. But by the 1930s, France's credibility as protector over her allies on the continent declined. When the Popular Front assumed power, relations with Great Britain were shaky. In 1935, Laval had refused to impose sanctions on Italy over the invasion of Ethiopia, against Britain's wishes, just as London likewise had done little to condemn Germany over the occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936. Great Britain also signed an agreement to limit naval weapons with Germany without consulting France. Some British conservative circles

even favored an Anglo-German entente over one with the leftist French government.⁷

Meanwhile, a Belgium nervous about both French and British inaction, as well as with the powerlessness of the League of Nations and the failure of the ongoing disarmament talks, decided to both break her alliance with France and Britain and ask them to preserve her neutrality. The Petite Entente of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania worried about France's ability to protect it both from Germany in Czechoslovakia's case, and in the cases of Poland and Romania, from Russia, with whom they feared France had a conflicting alliance.⁸

The lowered status of France "anguished" the new visionary Premier of France. Blum sensed in the turn of events

a new sign, a new symptom of that type of progressive breakdown of all our European positions, not only materially but politically. Symbolically, it was a sign of change and the prophesy of danger.

The sun was likewise setting on the British Empire. Britain turned inward while she strove to maintain her political and economic ties with her colonies. After World War I, Britain's finances were depleted and unemployment high. Though Britain still maintained her great navy, her army, like that of the United States, was totally disbanded.¹⁰ Eden on his side criticized the resultant growing British isolationism as "unrealistic," especially after Hitler's aggression in the Rhineland in March 1936. In truth, the League of Nations had come to "depend for its survival upon close Anglo-French cooperation."¹¹

Thus Blum set out to strengthen the alliance with Britain, which had already begun to revive with the previous Radical-Conservative

Sarraut government.¹² Blum confided to Eden, the British statesman reports, his fear that British public opinion:

was at the moment making the same mistake about Hitler as French public opinion had made about Italy; the latter had attempted to secure Mussolini's support against Hitler, and now it looked as though we were attempting to secure Hitler's support against Mussolini. I assured Blum that no such intention was in our mind.¹³

Britain had strategic as well as ideological interests in standing clear of Spain during the Civil War. As early as June 23, 1936 an envoy described "the chances of parliamentary government surviving" as "very slight." He added, in the same memo to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Eden, that

British firms in Spain have had their share of the difficulties resulting from the labour unrest and from the recent Government legislation, and our Embassy has been active in protesting to the Spanish Government against the application to British firms of the Provisions of the Decree of February 29th, the enforcement of which has been placed in the hands of popularly elected local commissions, from whose decision there is no appeal.¹⁴

The envoy noted the growing "anti-foreign feeling" in Spain and made quite clear the British interest in a stable, friendly government:

So long as the Spanish Government fails to put its own house in order and to regain its authority, there is little hope of obtaining any real satisfaction for British interests.¹⁵

According to Eden and to most British historians, nonintervention did not originate from British pressure, nor was Britain entrenched in the Franquist camp. And while Eden's first move was to ensure the safe exodus of British subjects from Spain, he told

the Spanish Ambassador on July 25 that the British government "would not obstruct the provision of supplies," including arms and munitions, to the Spanish Government.¹⁶ Britain also continued to sell oil to the Spanish Republic.¹⁷

If Eden can be believed and Great Britain did not in fact initiate the French nonintervention policy or sympathy with Franco, Britain nonetheless made clear her unwillingness to be on the side of a "communist takeover." Admiral Lord Chatfield had assumed the conflict in Spain was between the equally unsympathetic communists and fascists. By contrast, his French counterpart, Admiral Darlan, tried unsuccessfully to convince him a democratic government did exist in Spain and mentioned the possibility of London-Paris mediation to save it.¹⁸

Thomas Jones, former Deputy Secretary to the British cabinet who remained close with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, noted in his diary on July 27: "...S.B. was much affected by the Spanish troubles. 'I told Eden yesterday that on no account, French or other, must he brings us in to fight on the side of the Russians.'" ¹⁹ Four days later, Winston Churchill, then a conservative MP, wrote Corbin, the French Ambassador in London, "I am sure if France sent airplanes, etc. to the present Madrid Government, and the Germans and Italians pushed in from the other angle, the dominant forces here would have been with Germany and Italy, and estranged from France."²⁰

"On no account must we do anything to bolster up Communism in Spain," said Sir S. Hoare, "especially since it could spread to Lisbon" which "would be a grave danger to the British Empire."²¹ Hoare

and Chatfield surmised that in the event England's interests in the Mediterranean and on the Cape routes were endangered, Britain could easily "send ships, at short notice" but they would be "astonished" if Italy and Germany would attempt an attack because of their willingness to take part in the ongoing Locarno talks in London and to resume "friendly relations."²²

The most logical argument, and I think convincing from the French perspective, for nonintervention, was addressed to Delbos by Sir George Clerk on August 7. In fact, according to Dreifort, it had "a significant impact" on Delbos's commitment that evening to a formal French-directed policy of nonintervention. Clerk had asked him "how he was sure that the government in Madrid was the real government and not the screen behind which the most anarchistic elements in Spain were directing events?" He pointed out no law and order existed in Madrid. But here was the clincher:

I must put before him the danger of any action which might definitely commit the French government to one side of the conflict and to make more difficult the close cooperation between our two countries which was called for by this crisis.²³

Delbos thanked him for his openness and that he "wished nothing more than that the two Governments should act together as closely as possible." Delbos viewed Franco's possible Mediterranean concessions to Germany and Italy with "anxiety." Clerk responded

...I had reason to believe that the extremists in the Government were putting increasing pressure on M. Blum and I felt sure what I said might strengthen the hands of the moderate and sober elements.

After this interview the Foreign Office noted that Sir G. Clerk's language "is approved and appears to have had good result."²⁴

Still, it seems impossible to avoid the impression that the French were too easily convinced by Britain. Eden was clear on the British "rubber stamp": Blum "and Delbos knew only too well that any other course of action would sharply divide France, while open intervention by the great powers could lead to a European war. We agreed with this French decision of policy."²⁵ In Eden's view, then, Britain's agreement with Blum had no bearing on whether or not France would adopt a nonintervention policy.

So why did the legend of British pressure on Blum and Delbos gain popular credence? I am inclined to agree with Young and Carlton, that the British position was a pretext for the Popular Front.

Just as Blum's self-confessed lack of consultation with his military advisers raises doubt about the importance he appeared to attribute to strategic concerns, so too the lack of British pressure in late July-early August simply must weaken the contention that France ultimately bowed to British pressure and demands.²⁶

According to Young, the Popular Front, like the previous Sarraut government, took advantage of the French citizen's legitimate concern for national security and the British alliance, to detract attention from the potential split of the Popular Front cabinet. The unsuccessful Darlan mission represented the failure of the government to do so. Britain hardly forced France into nonintervention and came nowhere near the kind of arm-twisting used on Laval on Ethiopia in 1935.²⁷

Young's theory is convincing and attractive, but it fails to take into account that Blum himself did not hesitate to publicly assume the responsibility of nonintervention, and why he did so. Judging from the way Blum withstood opposition throughout his political career — he was even physically assaulted in February 1936 — it seems unlikely Blum would have adopted an opportunistic excuse for the policy. The Popular Front foreign policy objectives that he enunciated on June 23 before the Senate clearly indicated that the then unforeseen policy in Spain had a precedent in the Popular Front Platform.

We do not intend to hold any crusade other than the reconciliation of peoples, without exclusion. Propaganda or the battle for whatever political system must not be the pretext for war.²⁸

(Significantly, he mentioned Jaurès a few times). In this light, the nonintervention policy can be seen as a deliberate, inevitable act, and not as a desperate effort to save the Popular Front, along with its new social laws, from falling.

But would Britain really have abandoned Blum had he decided to go ahead with intervention? Cot thought not.

England would not have abandoned France in case of actual danger, because her interest would have forbidden such a move; it would have been impossible for her to remain out of a European war that was bound to result in a redistribution of international power. She would have followed us unwillingly, but she would have followed. Instead of an Anglo-French policy directed by the English conservatives, we would have had an international policy oriented by the Popular Front and suffered by the British conservatives. Democracy and the peoples of the British empire would have gained from the change.²⁹

Also, given what we know from Britain's participation in the Locarno talks of 1925 and July 1936, from Britain's economic and military decline, and her rising interest in the friendship of a democratic France (not strongly allied to the Soviet Union) and to the Churchill after 1936, it is likely Britain would at the very least not have taken the German side. But how effective would that British intervention have been? Great Britain's armaments production did not reach parity with France until 1938. The nonintervention agreement "gained time" for Britain.³⁰

Hindsight tells us that nonintervention was wrong because the fascist forces triumphed eventually, that Hitler and Mussolini were strengthened, and Britain and France humbled. Yet as American Secretary of State Cordell Hull reflected, "this argument would be valid only if the peace-loving nations, including the United States, had been prepared militarily and psychologically to abandon their effort toward maintaining peace and embark on a general preventive war. Such was not the case."³¹ And who was going to risk a preventive war in 1936? France and Britain (and Russia), the protectors of peace in Europe, were not.

CONCLUSION

Did Blum react consistently with his Socialist principles in the agreement not to intervene in the Spanish Civil War? Did he act reluctantly, bowing to pressure?

First, it is clear that Blum adopted the nonintervention policy with the greatest reluctance. Most of Blum's compatriots, primarily his former ministers Pierre Cot and André Blumel, and Fernando de los Rios, Jiminez de Asua, and Julio Just of the Spanish Republican government, had only praise and sympathy for Blum's humaneness. They separate the treaty from him, and characterize it as the sum total of domestic and foreign pressures on the Popular Front.¹ Pierre Mendes France was Blum's only close associate who continued to believe military aid in July and August 1936 would have effectively benefitted the Republic. This is to forget that at the time, all of the Madrid leaders, except for Negrin, did not themselves consider the affair significant. Also, this focus on military aid excludes other formulas of intervention: the simple opening of borders to free trade, or the immediate execution of France's 1935 war materiel treaties with Spain.²

To others, that Blum suffered deeply because of the turn of events does not excuse him. Colton and Lacouture agree with Alvarez del Vayo's judgment:

That he felt this despair attested to his deep sensitivity but does not absolve Leon Blum from the political responsibility he incurred when he gave his name and that of the French Socialist Party to the farce of non-intervention.³

Pertinax criticizes Blum's intellectualism and his escapes into abstractions. Blum closed himself off from the public: "He had to painfully gird himself whenever he felt action had to be taken. He is the French Pythagoras. He believed that divine numbers rule the world."⁴

Although nonintervention revealed itself to be indeed a farce, Blum acted fully conscious of the forces that could drive the country and the thin hope of international peace asunder. The Spanish Civil War divided the Left in France, whose support Blum had to have in order to govern at all.⁵ Some Left Socialists and Communists, such as the Communist leader Maurice Thorez, denounced nonintervention, "that juridical monstrosity which is assassinating our Spanish brothers."⁶ Others, such as Paul Faure, were ardent proponents of peace at any price. The majority of the Left, including Blum, continued to believe in nonintervention as the expression of collective security, the ability of grouped nations to effectively pressure the aggressor. Unilateral action of France in Spain would risk the British alliance, the touchstone, rightly or wrongly, of French foreign policy. Furthermore, to Jauresian Socialists, the unity of nations would lead to world peace which would in turn lead to Socialist revolution. The

pacifism of the Right was simpler: why fight to preserve a potentially Communist government? Above all, in order to understand the domestic turmoil of France, one must appreciate what Cordell Hull had termed the "paralysis" that gripped Europe after the devastation and demoralization of the previous war.

Blum's socialism was conditional to the time and crisis he faced, as he had always explained since the "vectorial sum" of changing forces metaphor he put forth in 1919.⁷

Would Jaurès have intervened? In a speech at Soissons on November 15, 1936, Blum answered no:

I told him: "But, Jaurès, aren't there moments where war is necessary!" And I cited some historical examples that had always obsessed me. I reminded him of the period between February and June 1848, which was one of the great historic moments of a troubled Europe.... And I told Jaurès: "But, at such a moment, wasn't it Lamartine who was wrong, who betrayed the Republic and the Revolution, in proclaiming a policy of non-intervention. The workers who, some weeks later, fell on Paris in the barricades of June, would it have been better if they had gone to the aid of Germany and Italy..." But Jaurès answered: "No! No! that would not have been better. Any time war can be avoided, it must be avoided. War is evil! Nothing good and noble can come out of war! It is not from war that humans learn goodness! It is not war which is revolutionary, it is peace!"⁸

Blum was torn in his own mind over the issue of when war is or is not acceptable. Unfortunately, the absolute impossibility of negotiating with a Hitler did not hit him until 1938, after the Anschluss, the concession of Czechoslovakia to Germany, and the victory of Franco in Spain. When it did, however, he did not hesitate to formulate a different outlook on national defense. In A l'échelle humaine, the

culmination of his life's work, written while he was imprisoned by Vichy, Blum finally and most eloquently resolved in his own mind the problem of peace. "Experience teaches," he wrote, "that in dreadful moments of his life, man only saves his life by risking it."⁹

He conceded the reality of a "Europe in arms." Given an armed Europe, he continued in A l'échelle humaine, there is no other way to preserve peace than by a system of "armed mutual assistance" and by pacts that are effective only when "each of the peoples who sign it are resolved to honor it with their blood."¹⁰ He disapproved of those who refused to "die for Danzig" and perhaps silently referred to his own actions during the Spanish Civil War. He is a harsh critic of the Left of the 30s:

The socialists and syndicalists were right to preach peace, but they reduced it and were reduced themselves by a tone of false good sense and egoism. Courage and the spirit of sacrifice are not survivors of barbarism; what is barbaric is the object to which Humanity still applies them. (i.e., to war).¹¹

Blum had come to recognize that the majority of the left during the 30s, himself included, shortsightedly sought peace without confronting the issue of how to enforce it. The paradox was twofold: that peace must be fought for, and that long-term goals could only be achieved through squarely resisting the present "barbarism," even if that barbarism threatens a nation other than one's own. The Blum of 1941 would have followed through and aided Spain.

But would the country have let him? The risks of civil war were not illusory. Provincial conservatism still predominated in 1936; the

working class was still too poor and isolated to foment and to win revolution; the Parliament on which the Popular Front relied was a bastion of conservatism; even the Communist Party had turned moderate. The nonintervention policy did not radically damage Blum's authority before the people, as the Luna Park speech demonstrated. Fewer people were against the policy than many would like to admit.¹²

In foreign affairs, as well as domestic, Blum faced the problem of credibility: how was he to instill confidence in a nation with its first Socialist and its first Jewish Premier? At the same time, international war threatened in 1936, all the more reason to turn to an appeasement policy. Italy had invaded Ethiopia in 1935; Germany reoccupied the Rhineland in March 1936; Japan was later to join the tripartite anticomintern pact with Germany and Italy; Stalin began the violent purges in the USSR in the summer of 1936; and civil war broke out in Spain.

Resignation was Blum's one viable alternative to the nonintervention policy. If Blum had intervened fully in Spain, he would not have had the undivided support of his constituency, his cabinet, and least of all, Parliament. Perhaps a Socialist opposition group in the Chamber, had Blum resigned or fallen, would have been more advantageous to the Republican cause. Along with a large fraction of the Radical Party, the CGT, and the Communists, the Socialist Party would have challenged the succeeding government as much as Blum himself had been pressured. Furthermore, Blum and the SFIO would have been spared the stain of the nonintervention policy. The new social laws would probably not have been revoked in the wake of a united working class opposition.

Ironically, the Germans were already prepared to concede a Republican victory. In a telegram to the Foreign Ministry on August 21, 1936, the German Ambassador to France remarked that if the arms embargo did not materialize, Blum and Delbos would no longer be able to risk the growing domestic political pressure and would have to "give unlimited support to the Spanish Government." "From considerations of geography alone, deliveries from countries which sympathize with the rebels could not compete with French support." He added that the consequent stream of Red Front volunteers to Spain "would then assume such proportions that consequences for foreign policy would be incalculable."¹³

Why did Blum remain in office, then, and succumb not to the interventionists on the Left, as Germany feared, but seemingly to a more "prudent" stance? For one, the Spanish Government itself urged Blum to stay in power. According to Jiminez de Asua, socialist lawyer, a vice president, and author of the Spanish Republican Constitution, the Spanish Government would rather have kept the sympathetic Blum government, than one more outwardly hostile to Spanish interests.¹⁴ Secondly, the nonintervention policy seemed genuinely viable. Britain and the United States supported the policy, along with the Soviet Union. Germany, as we have seen, agreed to the policy for fear of French, British and Russian intervention. Thirdly, Blum did sincerely believe the policy preserved peace at home and in Europe. In Luna Park Blum said that only when he could no longer reconcile his Socialist ideals, those of peace and the hope for all social classes and nations to cooperate, with his duty as France's

leader, would he resign. He almost did so in December 1936, when the Communists withheld their vote of confidence in the government due to the Popular Front policy on Spain, but he remained after his Spanish friends repeatedly urged him to do so.

Blum cannot be judged, then, without taking into account the various political, domestic, and ideological forces that both influenced and limited Blum in 1936. The Spanish Civil War experience taught Blum on the one hand, that with a more pragmatic, "Bismarckian," approach, one could correctly perceive the realities of the forces that drive people and how a leader could work within these limitations. Only with this knowledge in mind can ideals be applied. Socialism, like any other ideology, had not come from nowhere but itself originated in historical events. If any fault can be attributed to Blum, it must be too great a faith in the moral transformation of humanity. But while that faith, through nonintervention, led unwittingly to a defeated Republican Spain, it also helped to rally the French Resistance six years later. Pierre Mendès France remembers the "poignant feelings" of the free French in London toward Blum as he was defending himself before the Vichy government: "He was a prisoner on occupied soil and it was he who, though the bars of his cell, exhorted us, encouraged us, sustained us." ¹⁵

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